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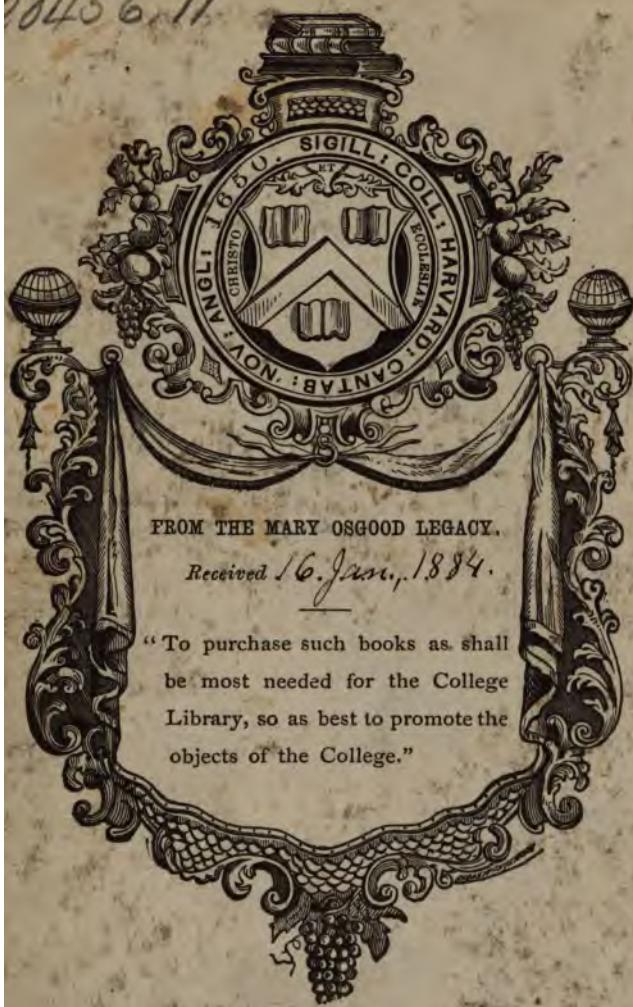
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LECTURES  
ON POETRY

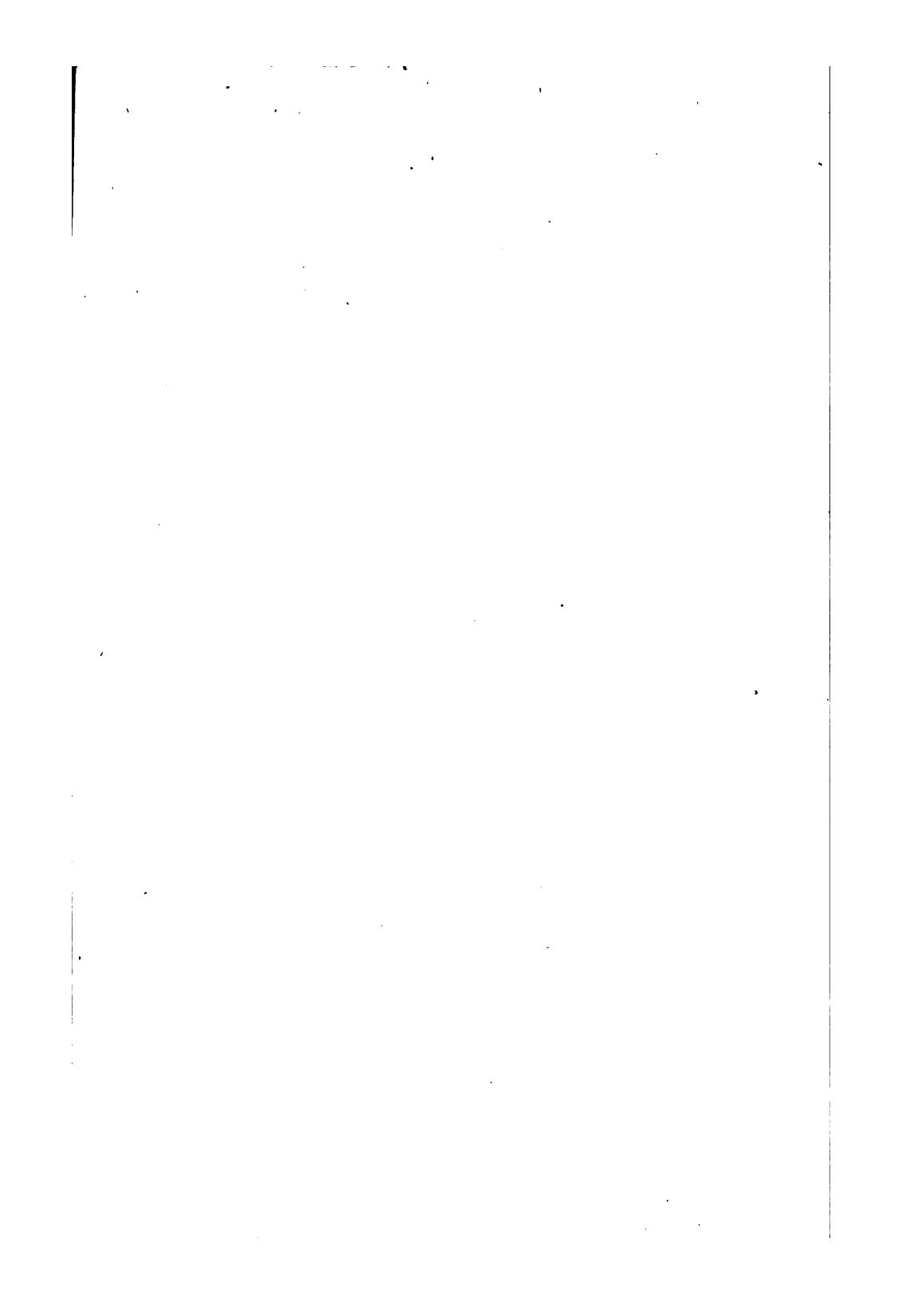
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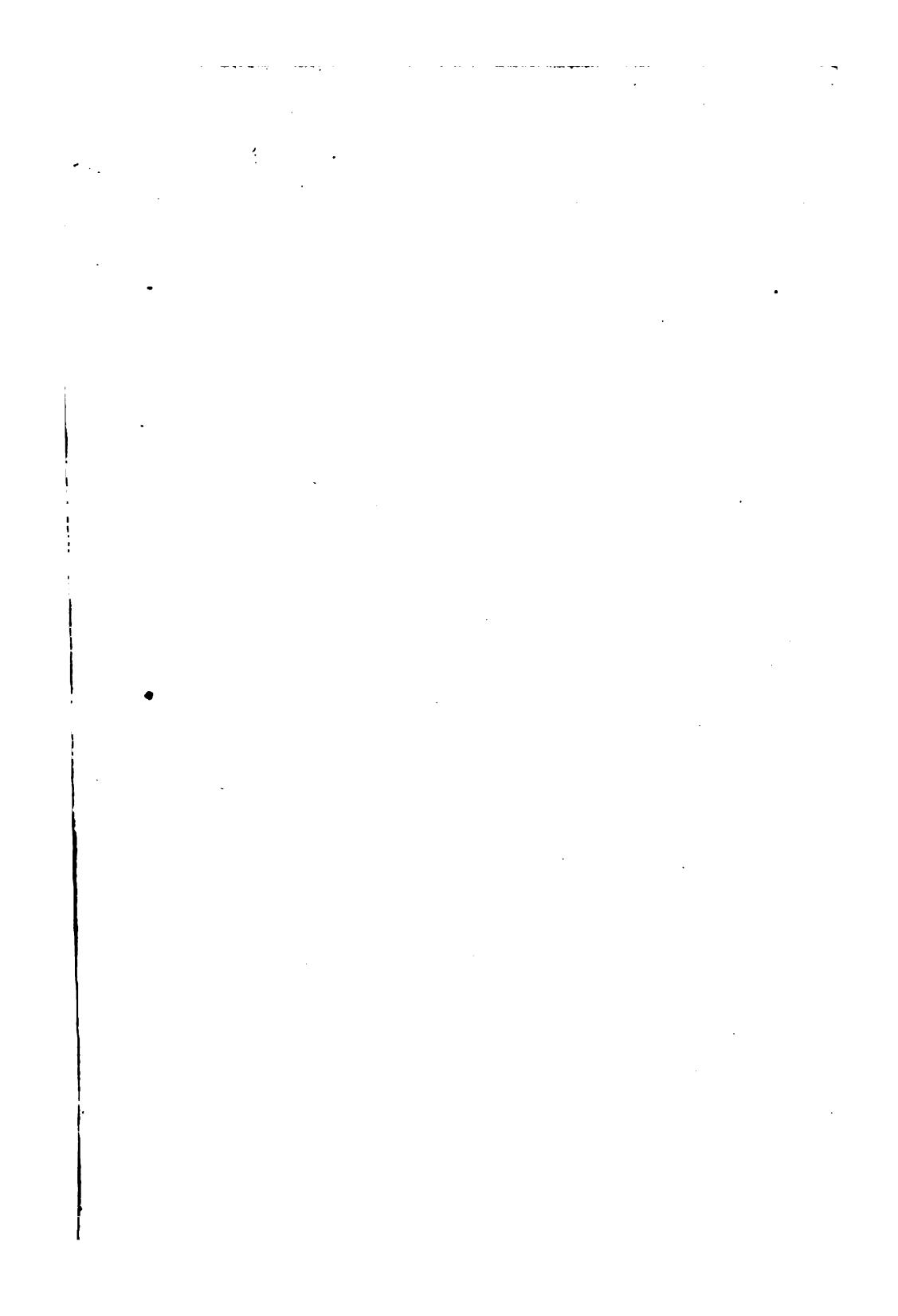
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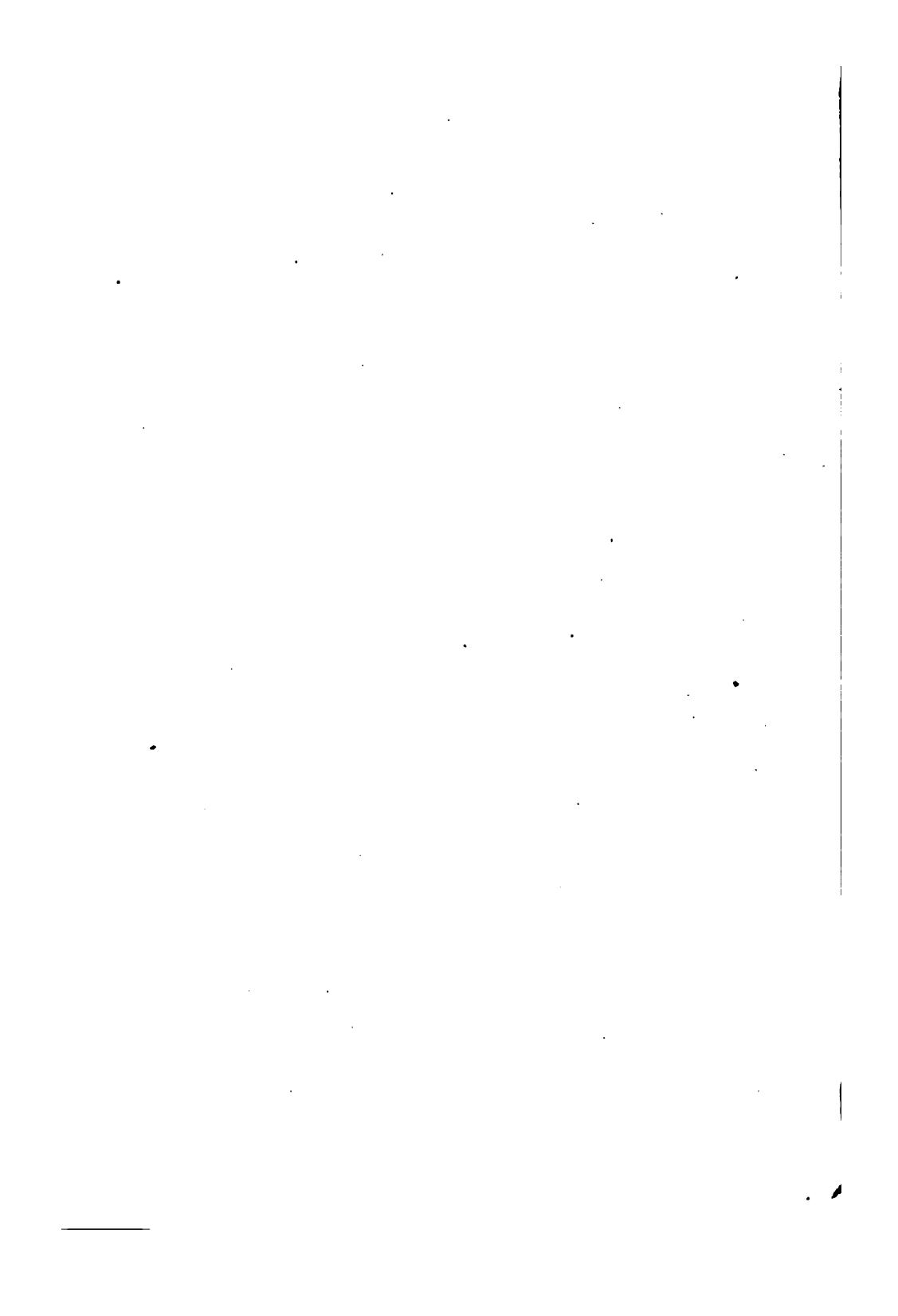
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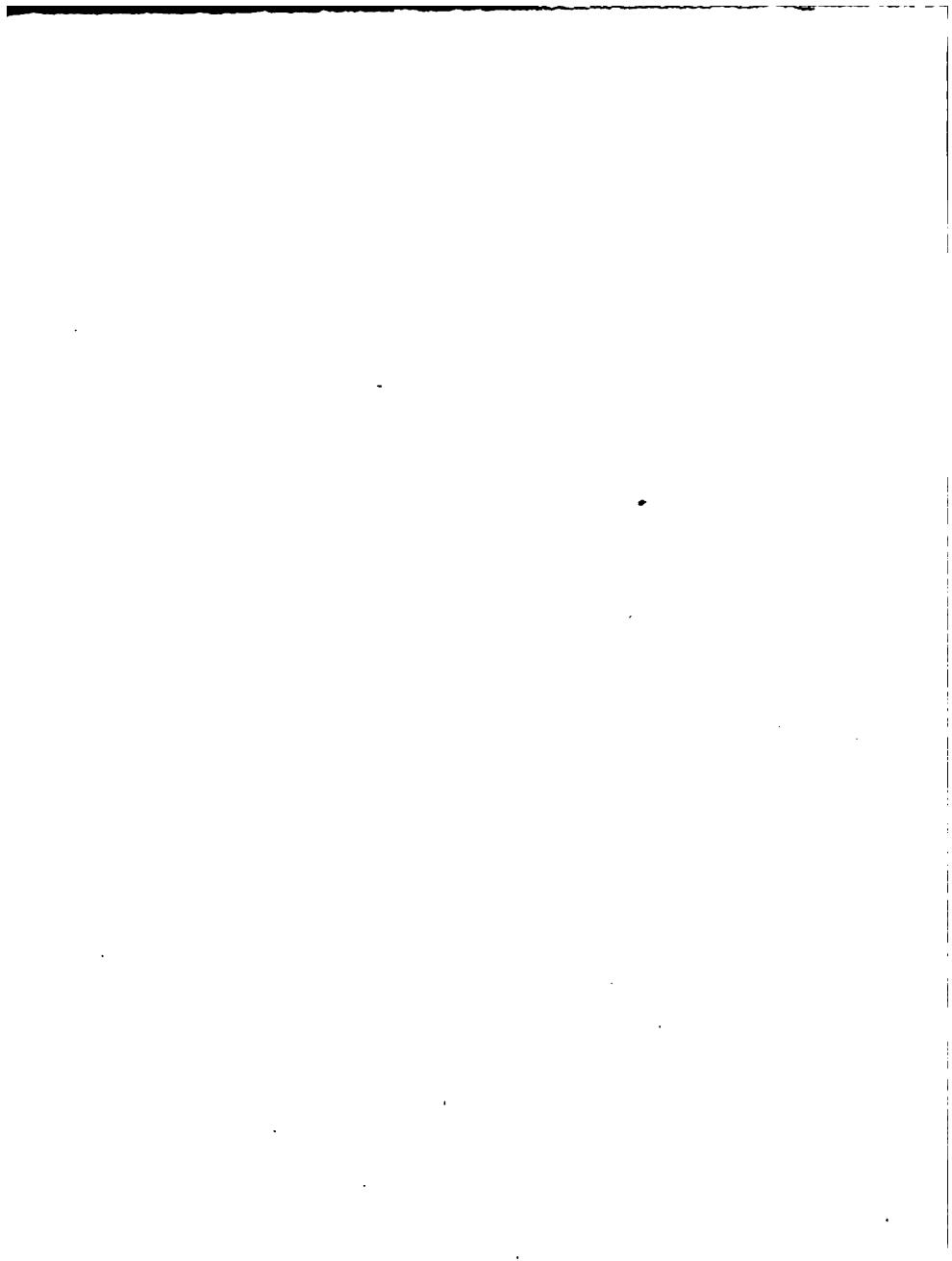






# LECTURES ON POETRY

*SECOND SERIES*



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# LECTURES ON POETRY

DELIVERED AT OXFORD

BY SIR FRANCIS HASTINGS <sup>(Charles)</sup> DOYLE, BART.

PROFESSOR OF POETRY IN THE  
UNIVERSITY

*SECOND SERIES*

C.  
LONDON

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

1877

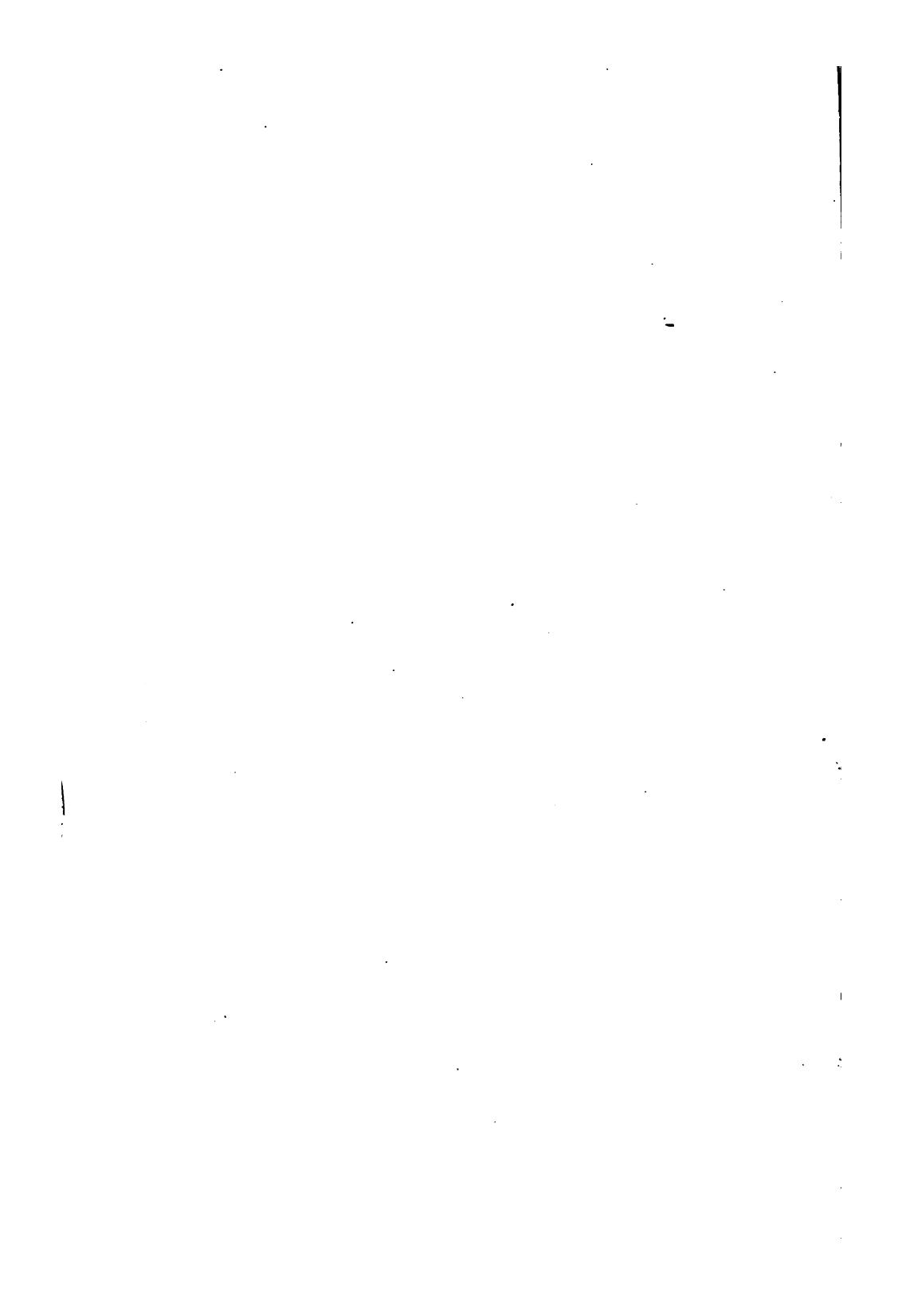
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TO  
THE WARDEN AND FELLOWS OF ALL SOULS COLLEGE  
IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF  
MANY KINDNESSES RECEIVED AT THEIR HANDS  
AND MANY PLEASANT HOURS SPENT IN THEIR SOCIETY  
DURING THE LAST TEN YEARS  
*This Volume is Inscribed*  
BY  
THE AUTHOR



## P R E F A C E.

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I APPREHEND that the University, though she exacts nothing of the kind, in some degree expects that those whom she has honoured with her Professorships should give what they have to give sooner or later to the world. Such being the case, I need advance no other reason for publishing these Lectures. The lectures which I have delivered in my time are of course more in number than those contained in this volume, but owing to a variety of accidents my manuscripts fell into confusion, and have many of them gone astray. I am obliged, therefore, to content myself with what comes readiest to my hand.

Of the Lectures that are missing I rather regret some, particularly two on 'Jason and Medea' and one on the tragedy of 'Hamlet.' My examination of 'Hamlet' ought to have come in between what I say of 'Othello' and what I say of 'Macbeth,' and its absence leaves rather a disastrous gap in the Shakspere series. It cannot, however, be helped now, and so many

able men have written about ‘Hamlet’ that the world, perhaps, needs nothing more.

Of the Lectures which do appear, I have only to say in other words much the same as I said on a former occasion. When people talk of a feeling for poetry they are guided by a just instinct. The north country mathematician observed, after reading ‘Virgil’ through, ‘It proves nought;’ now what he says of one poet we may extend to poets in general: poetry proves nought, and is too impalpable to be cut up into abstract propositions.

Any listeners, moreover, that I might have were not bound to come, nor if they did come were they bound to stay: my business, having once got hold of them, was to keep them in the Taylor Building till I had done speaking, if I could: accordingly, I thought it better to avoid all attempts at subtle criticism. I tried instead to interest my audience (and I may perhaps be pardoned for saying that I do not consider myself to have failed in doing so) by what the Greeks used to call Epideictic Orations. I trust, therefore, that any reader of mine, disposed to think my style too florid, or again too light and familiar, for a University lecturer will bear in mind what I have aimed at, will bear in mind that I claim for my Addresses every privilege of a speech: a speech, too, belonging to a particular class of orations, namely, as I have just said, Epideictic Orations. Now, for such a speech, in my judgment, ‘tous les genres sont bons,

hors le genre ennuyeux.' With regard to another point, my experience is, that if you choose remote and recondite subjects to lecture upon, nobody comes to hear you ; if, on the other hand, you choose such well-worn topics as the genius of Wordsworth, or of Scott, or of Shakspere, you incur, almost of necessity, obligations to previous writers. I have endeavoured to acknowledge honestly such debts, when I was clear to whom they were owing ; but of course much that I pass over in silence may be, and probably is, derived more or less, in one way or another, from older critics ; I hope that for this class of obligations a general acknowledgment may suffice. I plead guilty also (the Lectures having been delivered at times often widely separated from each other) to a certain amount of repetition, but I do not repeat myself unless I consider the subject worth returning to ; I have, therefore, had my manuscripts printed just as I found them.

With regard to the Poems at the end of the book, I have had lately so few opportunities of spending either time or thought upon versifying, that I certainly should not have published them, had it not been that to write an ode in honour of Lord Salisbury, for the Oxford Commemoration of 1870, became my duty as Poetry Professor ; indeed, it was perhaps the chief single act of my professorship. It seemed, therefore, but reasonable that I should attach this Ode to the Lectures, and, that once done, the few pieces of verse lying about in my drawers naturally followed in its wake.

Two of these poems—namely, ‘The Loss of the Birkenhead’ and ‘The Red Thread of Honour,’ have appeared before in a volume of mine long since out of print.

I republish these two poems here for different reasons : I republish ‘The Loss of the Birkenhead’ because, at the request of Mr. Palgrave, I made in it, to suit his excellent selection of verses for children, some slight alterations.

‘The Red Thread of Honour’ I republish without any alteration at all, upon quite other grounds ; it has been, I understand, translated into Pushtoo, and has become a favourite among the villagers of the North-western frontier of India ; my informant added that the tradition of ‘The Red Thread’ was universally known among them. I was gratified to learn this unexpected fact, I confess, partly perhaps from the vanity natural to the *genus irritabile*, but partly, also, because it showed that I have managed to express the strong interest I feel in any gallant barbarians who try to hold their own against the overwhelming resources of a civilised power, with some tolerable effect.

Of the longest among the poems, ‘Neamet and Noam,’ I have nothing to say, except a few words in reference to its versification. The story struck me, when I happened to be more at leisure than usual, as susceptible of poetical treatment ; I hesitated for some time as to the form in which I should put it, and finally

decided upon the rhymed heroic of Dryden and Pope : for certain purposes this old-fashioned measure is yet unsurpassed. With regard to what we may perhaps call the serious epigram, such as that, God

Lives through all life, extends through all extent,  
Spreads undivided, operates unspent.

Or again,

The spider's touch, how exquisitely fine,  
Feels at each thread, and lives along the line.

And other phrases of this kind, they cannot be expressed with the same force and terseness in any other metre that I know of. But a narrative poem, written in such strong and stinging couplets, would over-stimulate the critical palate—would remind us, in fact, of the Irishman's matchless apple pie that was to be made entirely of quince. Dryden, therefore, had recourse to triplets, to Alexandrines, and other poetical stratagems in the hope of making his verses more fluent and less monotonous. I have followed Dryden in this, I have even gone a little beyond him ; Shelley, and others since his time, have thrown a new light on the capabilities of the rhymed heroic, and I have not scrupled to take the hints that they afford. Still, however, I have endeavoured, in the main, to keep to the well-known metre of 'Theodore and Honoria,' 'Palamon and Arcite,' and other such poems, belonging to the end of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century. Mr. Morris's rhymed decasyllables may be just as good, may be

better, if you will, for a narrative poem, but they are not the same. My object has been to go on in the old groove, though I wish to make my lines as free as possible, consistently with what would, I suppose, be called in politics a liberal conservatism.

Having said thus much, I have nothing more to do, except to gladly avail myself of this opportunity to express my grateful thanks to the University in general, and to the Members of my own College in particular, for the kindness with which I have been met throughout my tenure of office.

ALL SOULS COLLEGE :

*February 10, 1877.*

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*Erratum.*

Page 77, line 13, *for he and I read we are.*

## LECTURE I. W O R D S W O R T H.

'THE PRELUDE' ETC.

'THE PRELUDE,' Wordsworth's longest poem, it is my purpose to examine to-day. At the same time, I do not propose to look at it entirely by itself. I have come to this decision mainly because it is connected in a remarkable—from some points of view, in a melancholy—manner, with all that is highest in Wordsworth's poetical achievements, with all that is likely to be most enduring in his poetical renown. Even on its own merits it well deserves a close and careful examination; but we must travel outside of this poem, and beyond it, if we wish to understand its full significance, both whilst the author was writing his 'Prelude,' and again, immediately after it had been written and completed. Taken by itself, it is, if not the best, at any rate, one of the most interesting productions of the age to which it belongs. Indeed, in one respect it stands, so far as I know, alone. No other poem occurs to me of equal length, of equal importance, composed by a great poet, at the very time when all his faculties were in their fullest vigour, which yet was kept apart and hidden away for so many years. '*Nonumque prematur in annum*' has become a proverb to express the *ne plus ultra* of discreet reticence and self-criticising suppression. But Wordsworth suppressed 'The Prelude,' not for nine years only, but for forty years at least. Nay, as far as he personally is concerned, when we remember how profound

was his instinct of immortality, how deeply-rooted his faith in the future destinies of the human spirit, we cannot help saying even more than this. According to his notions, everything that earth can bestow becomes, immediately after man's transference to a higher state of things, absolutely valueless and childish : We may then fairly say that 'The Prelude' was suppressed for good and all. This I affirm, because it was not given to us by him, but rescued from oblivion by others after his death ; and because, in this very poem by him so suppressed, we see of how little importance what is called posthumous fame appeared to Wordsworth, in comparison with all that is reserved for man, after he has passed beyond the limits of time. With solemn emphasis he, ranking among the few to whom a lasting reputation has been vouchsafed, finely expresses his conviction that the immortal soul, whatever its intellectual achievements here, must discover, as soon as it has been uplifted into other conditions of existence, that it has outgrown all the trappings and equipments belonging to its infancy on earth. It will have passed out of the atmosphere and surroundings where such things have any reality or purpose. Accordingly, in speaking of the power and permanence of man's literary work, this is what he says :—

Thou also, man, hast wrought,  
For commerce of thy nature with itself,  
Thoughts that aspire to unconquerable life :  
And yet we feel, we cannot choose but feel,  
That they must perish. Tremblings of the heart  
It gives, to think that our immortal spirits  
No more shall need such garments.

If, therefore, I do not misinterpret him, Wordsworth deliberately sacrificed this gigantic composition, during all those years when to publish it would have had a meaning for him. That this was anything but a light sacrifice for a poet possessed, and worthily possessed, by so high an opinion of himself and his own works, I need scarcely tell you. To proceed, however,

let us hear his own account of what 'The Prelude' was, or, at least, was intended to be :—

'Several years ago, when the author retired to his native mountains, with the hope of being able to construct a literary work that might live, it was a reasonable thing that he should take a review of his own mind, and examine how far nature and education had fitted him for such an employment. As subsidiary to this preparation, he undertook to record in verse the origin and progress of his own powers, so far as he was acquainted with them. The preparatory poem (that is, this very *Prelude*), is biographical, and conducts the author's mind to the point where he was emboldened to hope that his faculties were sufficiently matured, for entering on the arduous labour which he had proposed to himself; and the two works (namely "The *Prelude*," and "The *Recluse*," which came to nothing as a whole), have the same kind of relationship to each other as the ante-chapel has to the body of a Gothic church.'

One would have said that this passage, instinct as it is with a modest confidence and a noble self-dedication to the poet's art, augured well for the poet's hopes. But, alas for the vanity of all human wishes ! Alas for the evanescence of all human expectations ! 'The *Prelude*' was begun in 1799, it was finished in the summer of 1805. Now, after 1805 or 1806, at latest, the history of Wordsworth's mental progress was, comparatively speaking, of little importance to mankind. Those faculties which 'The *Prelude*' was to test and gauge may have been matured, but they were also somewhat chilled. Much fruit ripened, no doubt, after these years ; but it did not ripen as genially as it should have done ; and it is out of the beauty of promise, not out of the beauty of fulfilment, or the fondly anticipated harvests of perfection, that Wordsworth's wreath of immortality has, after all, to be woven. It is, if we may borrow his own metaphor, 'Of budding roses, not of roses in full bloom,' that his unfading coronal has been framed. 'The *Prelude*', begun, as I have said in 1799, and ended in 1805, was looked upon by its author scarcely as a poem in itself ; it was rather the stedfast and solemn preparation for a poetical career. In other words, it was, as he tells us, only a prelude. The great

ode of his life was destined to be sung to higher music ; when the self-examination had been carried into effect, the education completed, the strength measured and ascertained. Alas ! I say again, for the vanity of human wishes ! for the evanescence of human expectations ! The trained poet, who was so eager and so confident, rejoicing as a giant to run his course, did indeed run his course as a giant ; but he ran it whilst the prelude was being written—whilst the process of education was going on—not after it had been accomplished and left behind. And this, perhaps, may be one reason—a somewhat melancholy reason, as I have said—why the world at large knew little or nothing of ‘The Prelude,’ till all worldly reputation had become ‘the dream of a shadow,’ till the eyes and ears of the poet were occupied by other lights, and other harmonies, than those of earth.

I know very well that the imagination helps us, when we speak of Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley, and the like, to raise up forms and pictures for the mind, without consciously analysing them into their ultimate elements. But if they are so analysed what we really mean is this. By Lord Byron we now mean ‘Childe Harold,’ ‘Manfred,’ ‘The Siege of Corinth,’ ‘Don Juan,’ &c. By Shelley, ‘Alastor,’ ‘Adonais,’ ‘The Cenci,’ and so on. By Wordsworth, in like manner, we mean little more than a certain number of his poems. And if we look into the matter, we shall find that, when ‘The Prelude’ was written and finished, these poems, or, at any rate, the great majority of them, were written and finished also. You can easily verify this statement for yourselves. Without wearying you by a long list of names, I will only observe that the ‘Lines on Revisiting Tintern Abbey’ were written in 1799 ; ‘The Brothers’ in 1800 ; and the ‘Ode on the Anticipations of Immortality,’ the latest, I think, of Wordsworth’s productions, revealing his genius at its highest point of energy, between 1803 and 1806.

The principal effort made by him to surpass his earlier self, in the after years, was, perhaps, when he wrote ‘The Excursion’

—a poem not published till 1814. It was, undoubtedly, a noble effort, a *fluctus decumanus*, if you will ; but the *fluctus decumanus* of a tide, in my judgment, already on the ebb.

There will be, I dare say, many good critics dissenting vehemently from me upon such points ; and against such critics I have nothing to say, except that I am bound to give utterance to my own opinions and not to theirs. Poetry is in some respects like personal beauty. If all opinions were absolutely in unison about them they would both be less interesting, and from the narrowing of their influence, they would affect men less than they do now. Nature herself throughout her realm seems to abhor monotony. You may, perhaps, recollect a story about Paley; how, with his broad Yorkshire dialect, he astonished his Bishop when that right reverend person condescended to inform his subordinate, that the day before them was the anniversary of his wedding day, and that during all the forty or fifty years that had elapsed since the auspicious event had taken place, no angry word had ever passed between him and his wife. ‘Moighty dool, moighty dool, indeed, my lord !’ broke at once from the lips of the unsympathising Archdeacon. Everybody agreed with Paley, of course ; but, in justice to Mrs. Barrington, I must add, that the Bishop nobody believed.

Now, with regard to personal beauty, as with regard to poetry and art, Nature, abhorring as I have said monotony, has exerted herself to prevent this ‘moighty doolness.’ The endless varieties of temperament, of caprice, of eccentricity itself, are always in action ; and looking to the interests of the whole, in healthy action, too. There are, in almost every constitution, certain special fibres that throb in answer to certain influences, and are silent to others ; just as one *Æolian* harp may respond to a gust that meets with no reply but from it, though many similar *Æolian* harps may be close at hand.

Such varieties of impulse, acting upon various characters, are always at work in a thousand ways, and create a thousand

complications. They insinuate themselves into our judgments, to float between them and the absolute truth, colouring and modifying even the justest and clearest conceptions. They keep varying thus like clouds or shiftings of the atmosphere (at one moment in this valley, at another over the next), that colour and modify the white light of the sun.

When, therefore, I say that the poem of 'The Brothers,' written in 1800, constitutes for me Wordsworth's high-water mark, I do not expect, I do not ask for, universal acquiescence. Still, I believe that most of his admirers would agree that about the time when Wordsworth wrote 'The Brothers,' and other exquisite poems whose name is legion, he was moving onwards in all the freshness and power and majesty of his genius; and that, to the years 1799 and 1800, his greatest advance in poetry belongs. This being so, we can picture to ourselves with what buoyancy and strength, with what proud serenity, and in how exulting a spirit, the earlier portions of 'The Prelude' were written.

Taking for the moment 'The Brothers' as Wordsworth's finest poem, let us put this 'Prelude' aside for a little while, in order that we may sympathise with the stately self-reliance of the lonely bard, as he sat apart in his mountain home and felt—

Divinity within him breeding wings  
Wherewith to scorn the earth.

We know now how he paused at intervals in his noble task; and how he employed those intervals; or how, if he ever rested absolutely, it was to fix his eyes upon the future, in the sure and certain hope that he should behold, ere long, the temple of his glory rising, as it were, to the sound of solemn music, 'like a golden exhalation of the dawn.'

It is probably not necessary to trouble you with an analysis of 'The Brothers.' In order, however, to take nothing for granted—a great fault in argument, in criticism, in life itself—I must ask you to pardon me if I recall to your minds the

outline of this well-known composition. Two brothers of an ancient family among the Cumberland dalesmen, whose love for each other has been rendered more intense by poverty, by orphanage, by the absence of other kindred, and by the closest companionship from childhood, have had (after seeing the little freehold, owned for centuries by men of their names, swallowed up in a gulf of debt) to submit to one of the commonest forms of our English sorrow—one of our English greatness at the same time—inevitable separation for years, if not for ever.

These, whether it blew fair or foul, these two  
 Were brother Shepherds on their native hills.  
 They were the last of all their race : and now,  
 When Leonard had approach'd his home, his heart  
 Fail'd in him ; and, not venturing to enquire  
 Tidings of one whom he so dearly loved,  
 Towards the church-yard he had turn'd aside ;  
 That, as he knew in what particular spot  
 His family were laid, he thence might learn  
 If still his brother lived, or to the file  
 Another grave was added.—He had found  
 Another grave,—near which a full half-hour  
 He had remain'd ; but, as he gazed, there grew  
 Such a confusion in his memory,  
 That he began to doubt ; and he had hopes  
 That he had seen this heap of turf before,—  
 That it was not another grave; but one  
 He had forgotten. He had lost his path,  
 As up the vale, that afternoon, he walk'd  
 Through fields which once had been well known to him :  
 And oh what joy the recollection now  
 Sent to his heart ! He lifted up his eyes,  
 And, looking round, imagined that he saw  
 Strange alteration wrought on every side  
 Among the woods and fields, and that the rocks,  
 And everlasting hills themselves were changed.

Leonard then hears from the Vicar that—

If there were one among us who had heard  
 That Leonard Ewbank was come home again,  
 From the great Gavel, down by Leeza's Banks,  
 And down the Enna, far as Egremont,  
 That day would be a day of festival.

These words naturally carried to the heart of him who heard them—Leonard Ewbank himself—a rush of exhilaration and hope ; such joy, such congratulations, would be impossible, if he came back only to count the graves of his family, and to find that their number had been increased by one, so that he alone was left. For at last Leonard Ewbank, after twelve years of hardship and adventure, of slavery among the Moors, and other calamities cutting him off from all communication with his friends at home, is in his native valley once more. Being a sensitive man, however, his nerves are on the stretch ; there is a fighting at his heart, so that he cannot bring himself to ask his old friend, the Vicar, who takes him for a stranger, the plain direct question which he thirsts to have answered. Any sensible, straightforward man of business would have gone up at once to the Parson, and said, ‘Reverend Sir, can you tell me whether James Ewbank is alive or dead ?’

But Leonard Ewbank, it seems, was anything but a sensible straightforward man of business, and to that fortunate infirmity of his we owe one of the most beautiful poems in the English—or, indeed, in any other language. The scheme of the poem is simply this :—Leonard, afraid of encountering the dreadful announcement of his brother’s death, dares not to ask a direct question, but seeks, by one innocent stratagem after another, to extract the truth without revealing himself. The Priest, however, with whom he is discoursing, puts aside all these simple manœuvres, insists upon talking about Leonard, in whom he naturally takes more interest than in the dead James, and unknowingly baffles every suggestion, just as if he did it on purpose. At one time he unconsciously alarms, at another ignorantly encourages, his questioner Leonard, till, in the end, all possibilities of delay are exhausted, and the fatal truth, so long suspended in vain, falls heavily upon the despairing enquirer.

The process by which this is effected—the gradual fulfilment of the first ominous indications—the gradual deepening of the

gloom—chequered, as it is, by hopeful gleams and flashes, even till we reach the absolute catastrophe, fills me with admiration. It is not only exquisite in itself, but what is much rarer in Wordsworth, a masterpiece of dramatic and tragic power. This quality it is, so seldom found in our author, that gives to the poem before us its exceptional value in my eyes.

I confess, also, that my own personal temper sympathises so much with that of Leonard, when he shrinks from directly challenging the perilous truth, that perhaps I am bribed, as it were, by such sympathies, to place this poem above one or two others which many good critics place above it. But no one, though he may perhaps prefer the 'Leech-gatherer,' or 'The Platonic Ode' (as Wordsworthians used to call it), will deny, I am sure, that the struggle in Leonard's mind is conceived and executed with consummate genius, and also with, what I have already said, is less common in our author—consummate art.

The first blow struck is the answer of the clergyman to Leonard, who has pointed out to him certain changes in the scenery, and the aspects of the dale. These changes, you must bear in mind, had been welcomed by Leonard as inconsistent with his boyish recollections; as tending, therefore, to show that his memory need not be infallible, and that consequently he might be mistaken in fancying that he recognised a new grave in that part of the churchyard, where his kinsmen and ancestors lay buried.

He addresses the Priest to whom such casual changes were of small importance, and forces him at last to acknowledge one change that has indeed taken place.

But, surely, yonder.

To this ejaculation the Priest makes answer in a passage not the most sublime, not the most powerful, but perhaps the most exquisitely beautiful in all Wordsworth; if I added in the whole

range of English poetry, I do not know that I should be far wrong.

There was a foot-way all along the fields  
By the brook-side—'tis gone — and that dark cleft !  
To me it does not seem to wear the face  
Which then it had.

PRIEST.

Nay, sir, for aught I know,  
That cleft is much the same—

LEONARD.

But, surely, yonder—

PRIEST.

Ay ! there, indeed, your memory is a friend  
That does not play you false. On that tall pike  
(It is the loneliest place of all these hills)  
There were two springs that bubbled side by side,  
As if they had been made that they might be  
Companions to each other : the huge crag  
Was rent with lightning—one hath disappear'd ;  
The other, left behind, is flowing still.

This is the first hint of the approaching catastrophe, the first stealthy advance of the shadow of death. The memory of Leonard Ewbank, therefore, had not failed him ; the dark mountain cleft had changed its aspect and character, the brotherhood of the two fountains existed no more, and the vanishing of that old companionship must have struck with its weight of suggestion on the heart of Leonard Ewbank then, just as it strikes on the heart of the reader now. It must have carried with it the chill presentiment of a dissolution of that other companionship, an extinction of that other brotherhood, then actually in question. Nay, by establishing how accurately Leonard remembered what was, and what was not, the unascertained grave, the doubtful addition to the family burial-place, recovers for itself and for us (though scarcely as yet for Leonard) a dismal reality and truth. It shows that, in think-

ing he had found another grave, there was no confusion in his thought ; he has not forgotten, but remembered only too well. ‘ Bodings, unsanctioned by the will,’ must, in spite of his struggles to continue unconvinced, have inflicted themselves upon his spirit, and given him, for a moment at least, an unwelcome insight into the fatal certainty. But ‘ Hope springs eternal in the human breast,’ and the art of the poet in this poem, as I have said, not less consummate than his genius, intervenes with an exquisite touch of dramatic skill. A cheering thought gathered from the Vicar’s story breaks through the thickening gloom, here and there, like an unexpected outburst of sunshine, such as—

Ay, sir, that passed away :  
He was the child of all the Dale, &c.

- But, still every impartial person must have foreseen the end from a distance : soon we learn—always kept off from the truth, that

When his brother  
Was gone to sea, and he was left alone,  
The little colour that he had was soon  
Stolen from his cheek ; he droop’d, and pined, and pined.

Then comes the splendid exclamation, the last despairing flash of hope, the last appeal for life, as it were, from the guns of a foundering ship :—

But these are all the graves of full-grown men.

The interest of ‘ The Brothers’ culminates here, but it moves on to the end in quiet beauty, with an absolute perfection of style and thought, making us feel that ‘ Laodamia,’ ‘ Dion,’ and other poems, all of high merit, belonging to Wordsworth’s later years, are stilted and cold in comparison—rather fine specimens of his semi-poetical rhetoric than his poetry itself.

It may be as well, perhaps, that I should read the end of ‘ The Brothers’ before passing on.

The Priest here ended—  
 The Stranger would have thank'd him, but he felt  
 A gushing from his heart, that took away  
 The power of speech. Both left the spot in silence.

The other thank'd him with a fervent voice ;  
 But added, that, the evening being calm,  
 He would pursue his journey. So they parted.  
 It was not long ere Leonard reach'd a grove  
 That overhung the road : he there stopp'd short,  
 And, sitting down beneath the trees, review'd  
 All that the Priest had said : his early years  
 Were with him in his heart : his cherish'd hopes,  
 And thoughts which had been his an hour before,  
 All press'd on him with such a weight, that now,  
 This vale, where he had been so happy, seem'd  
 A place in which he could not bear to live :  
 So he relinquish'd all his purposes.  
 He travell'd on to Egremont: and thence  
 That night, he wrote a letter to the Priest,  
 Reminding him of what had pass'd between them ;  
 And adding, with a hope to be forgiven,  
 That it was from the weakness of his heart  
 He had not dared to tell him who he was.

This done, he went on shipboard, and is now  
 A seaman, a grey-headed mariner.

So much for ‘The Brothers.’ My special favourite; as I have told you ; but there are at least twenty other poems written, I believe without exception, in those hours of ease when ‘The Prelude’ was hung up for a moment. I will name only two, ‘The Lines on Revisiting Tintern Abbey,’ and the Ode called shortly by its admirers ‘The Platonic Ode.’ Can we wonder then that the man who in the intervals of his self-appointed task, indulged himself, by way of relaxation, in writing poetry fit to match itself against the greatest efforts of our greatest masters, should imagine that when his task was over, when his final first-class degree (if I may be pardoned the local metaphor) was awarded and registered, it would be his natural destiny to soar upwards, ‘like a pyramid of fire,’ into the

highest heaven of invention and renown? But the wind bloweth where it listeth, and the breath of poetical inspiration is like that wind in its uncertainty and seeming caprice.

Wordsworth 'grew immortal in his own despite'—I had almost said against his conscience. He grew immortal because the austere efforts, through which he was teaching himself to become a poet, wearied him at times; and whenever that was the case, he deviated into poems (though still, from his own point of view, little better than a learner and a disciple) scarcely, if at all, to be surpassed. Poems, and perhaps this is one explanation of their supreme excellence, with all the flavour and relish upon his palate of stolen waters and bread eaten in secret. In writing them, he was like an Eton boy out of bounds; he was a truant from 'The Prelude'; he was shirking school, he was dodging his tutor, he was claiming his natural liberty in defiance of a formal promise and a self-recorded law.

Now the delight of such an escape must have been intense, for the yoke of 'The Prelude' cannot but often have lain heavy upon him; and in proportion to its weight and pressure, must have been the sense of relief, when he broke away from it to rush into glorious songs as they rose up unbidden around him, taking no thought of the morrow.

Again, to write this 'Prelude,' he tells us that he retired, after solemn deliberation, to his native mountains. Retired! yes! and from what? From London, from Paris, from a world fermenting with hopes and aspirations, such as had never revealed themselves to earth's struggling millions since the first birth of time—hopes and aspirations, taking Wordsworth himself captive, as we may see, above all ordinary men, and filling his heart with passionate enthusiasm. He is retiring, we may say, from the fall of the Bastile, from the convulsions of Europe, from the newsman's horn, as it announces, hour after hour, some new glory of Nelson; some fresh triumph of Bonaparte, some earthquake shock of victory or defeat, perplexing nations and

shattering thrones. From all this he retires, and again I ask—To what? To Cumberland shepherds and shepherdesses, to a thinly-peopled district, walled off from the intensities of life by a dim solitude of hills and moors and waters. He must have come into this solitude, one would think, trusting that the forces already accumulated within him were sufficient to maintain, in spite of waste and absorption, a current of unexhausted power. He must have come as the Nile comes, when it dashes into the desert, roaring onwards beneath the rush of an Abyssinian rainfall. Down upon that desert the Nile leaps, as we all know, to roll along thenceforwards without any affluent worth speaking of; without a single drop of water from the parching skies to enrich its channel or inspirit its life, till it reaches its home in the distant sea. A mighty river always; but, during these latter aspects of its course, in proportion as the stormy influences of old, the hurricanes and tempests that clothed its youth with thunder, are left behind and forgotten, a river lessening rather than increasing in strength, and lessening for this reason only, that it relies, and has to rely, upon itself alone.

I cannot but think that to this mistake of Wordsworth's we may attribute the partial failure of hopes and expectations, which, as all men would now agree, were fully justified at the outset. In my judgment it is hardly wise, for one who wishes '*virum volitare per ora*,' to separate himself thus, in his daily habits and needs, from the greater interests and passions of mankind.

Wordsworth, however, thought differently. Nature, and meditations upon Nature, revealed themselves to him as the true fountains of a poetic life; and when we learn by reading his works what these two fountains have given us, we scarcely know how to blame the decision he came to. Still, it is open to us to believe, if we like, that a Wordsworth who had not buried himself among the Cumberland Fells, who had not, as it

were, called upon the hills to cover him, would have been a different Wordsworth, a Wordsworth more illustrious than even now he is.

Another element that I think did not work for good during these hermit-like and self-centred years, was the hardness and loneliness of his own character. At the beginning of his career, whilst his mind was yet unformed and unset, this masculine, and somewhat cold indifference to others was possibly an advantage and a help. But afterwards, it is to be doubted whether a more genial temper, more power of entering into the merits and feelings of his contemporaries, might not have enlivened and strengthened his mind. There is a story told of his visiting Abbotsford : at the moment of his arrival Walter Scott was engaged, and sent down an apology for not welcoming him on the instant ; when he did make his appearance he found that the Bard of Rydal had taken a book from the shelf. It was a volume of his own poems, out of which he was reading verses of his own, to his own sister to wile away the time. He might, perhaps, in that new place, full of other associations, have recollected with advantage, in reference, I will not say to the volume, but to the woman at any rate, this well-known scriptural text, ‘The poor you have always with you.’

A third reason, perhaps, why he did not soar so high as the glorious promises of his youth warranted him in anticipating, was not so much his own fault as the fault of other men. He was at first a somewhat unsuccessful and unpopular poet ; that being so, what Sir Henry Taylor so well calls ‘the leaden spirit of defeat’ may have weighed him down, and depressed him below himself. Proud as he was, and likely to resent the suggestion of such a possibility as an insult, no man can escape from what Porson once called, on a celebrated occasion, the ‘Nature of Things.’<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Porson is reported to have said, on having his attention called to the

Lastly, the death of that unknown Lucy, of whom he never spoke, and about whom none of his friends ventured to question him, inflicted, perhaps, a wound, skinned over and healed at the surface, but ever bleeding inwardly, so as to dull the elasticity, and tarnish the gloss and splendour of his early strength.

That there was an element of some sort or other interfering with, and rebelling against, his pre-conceived plan of self-education, we learn from the first book of 'The Prelude.'

It is shaken off,  
That burthen of my own unnatural self,  
The heavy weight of many a weary day  
Not mine, and such as were not made for me.

That hope hath been discouraged, welcome light  
Dawns from the East, but dawns to disappear,  
And mock me with a sky that ripens not  
Into a steady morning : if my mind,  
Remembering the bold promise of its past,  
Would gladly grapple with some noble theme,  
Vain is her wish : where'er she turns she finds  
Impediments from day to day renewed.

Whatever impediments, however, may have arisen in France or London, after this he was again at liberty—perhaps too much at liberty. He could sit down in his native vale, and meditate on his future achievements after this fashion:—

Sometimes, the ambitious power of choice, mistaking  
Proud spring-tide swellings for a regular sea,  
Will settle on some British theme, some old  
Romantic tale by Milton left unsung.

Sometimes, more sternly moved, I would relate  
How vanquished Mithridates northward passed,  
And, hidden in the cloud of years, became  
Odin, the Father of a race, by whom  
Perished the Roman empire . . . .

fact that it was impossible to light his candle so long as the extinguisher remained upon it, '*Curse the Nature of Things.*'

How Gustavus sought  
 Help at his need in Dalecarlia's mines ;  
 How Wallace fought for Scotland ; left the name  
 Of Wallace to be found, like a wild flower,  
 All over his dear country, left the deeds  
 Of Wallace, like a family of ghosts,  
 To people the steep rocks, and river banks.

Then a wish —  
 My last and favourite aspiration, mounts  
 With yearning towards some philosophic song  
 Of Truth, that cherishes our daily life ;  
 With meditations passionate from deep  
 Recesses in man's heart, immortal verse  
 Thoughtfully fitted to the Orphean lyre.

*Prelude*, Book i., between lines 164-231.

His dreams of ambition varied, as we see, with his varying moods of mind. Before, however, undertaking any one of these noble tasks, he was determined to plunge into the past ; and, as another great poet has expressed himself, to trace

Home to its cloud, the lightning of the mind.

I have hinted that Wordsworth perhaps weakened the life of that vital soul on which, in this very poem, he prides himself, by cherished habits of self-isolation ; I had almost said, of self-worship. At the same time it cannot be denied that the mischief, if mischief there were, grew out of this after his character had been fixed and hardened, not whilst it was in the process of fixing itself. We all know that a love, or I would rather say a habit, of solitude, and solitary thoughts, is one of the common, if not one of the necessary conditions combining to make up the poetic temper.

There are men, with powers to have gained distinction in other ways, who seem to be cradled into poetry by some peculiarities of character or position, which separate them from contemporaries and equals during the docile period of their youth. The lameness and early ill-health of Scott; the lameness and wounded pride of Byron, a man of high rank crippled

by poverty ; splendid talents, marred by inherited vice and a freakish perversity of disposition ; splendid personal beauty, darkened by one incurable physical defect, descended from an ancient and noble family, with yet a cloud and a taint hanging over it ; the illused and unsocial childhood of Shelley ; but why finish the sentence ? Why multiply instances when there is really no question before us ?

We must all remember that a boy, who obtruded poetic reveries and aspirations into the cricket and football of his companions at a public school, was very apt to be laughed at and to be christened Mad Jones, or Mad Tompkins, or Mad Shelley as the case might be. Now there is no Jones who desires to be laughed at, no Tompkins who likes to be called Mad Tompkins, in the little world, which, for the time, is a great one to him ; and, therefore, in proportion as his impulses to poetry are strong, in that proportion is he driven back upon himself, and lifted away into solitude. Accordingly, Wordsworth's early education seems to have been, for him, in these respects most fortunate. He was sent to a rough public school, where the boys, dotted about in cottages, appeared to have done pretty much what they liked. These cottages were kept each of them by some aged dame, and the boyish inmates of these little homes enjoyed, if Wordsworth's recollections were accurate, a degree of independence not approached even in those famous schools with which we are more familiar : schools certainly not erring on the side of over-watchfulness or priggish restrictions.

There do not seem to have been any bounds, any vexatious limitations to amusement or exercise ; any enquiry, in a word, as to how the scholars employed or wasted their time when out of school. The dames and tutors, relying, I daresay, on the remoteness of the place, and the absence of all ordinary temptations, left everything to fate and chance. For Wordsworth's peculiar genius and disposition nothing could have

been better--at the time. Though a man of earnest mind, he never was a student, in the common—I might say, in any sense of the word ; but he felt and thought deeply, and his passion for all natural objects was such that Nature impressed herself upon him instantly and irresistibly. A school, therefore, which allowed him to wander at will, in communion with Nature, his nurse and mistress, suited him far better than any place where, cooped up in a narrow playground, he might have received the soundest instruction about Dawes's Canons, or the dogmas of Porson as to the fifth foot of an iambic trimeter. Even before he left home for the first time, his delight in his own thoughts and his own company had begun to show itself.

Oh ! many a time have I, a five years' child,  
In a small mill-race severed from the stream,  
Made one long bathing of a summer's day ;  
Basked in the sun, and plunged and basked again  
Alternate, all a summer's day, or scoured  
The sandy fields, leaping through flowery groves  
Of yellow ragwort, or where rock and hill,  
The woods, and distant Skiddaw's lofty height  
Was bronzed with deepest radiance, stood alone  
Beneath the sky, as if I had been born  
On Indian plains, and from my mother's hut  
Had run abroad in wantonness, to sport  
A naked savage in the thunder shower.

*Prelude*, Book i.

Even at this early age, therefore, when most children are under the care of nurses, to be slapped and shaken, if, as real children are bound to do, they hide themselves away from grown-up people, spoil their clothes, and transact the proper amount of mischief, he seems to have been left unshaken and unslapped ; and thus to have tasted, in a most unusual degree, the joys of solitary enterprise and unchartered freedom. To his school, where, out of school at least, there seems to have been but little more discipline, he carried with him this semi-barbaric spirit of independence.

Moreover, as, of course, so young a creature must often,

when unguarded and far away, have been stricken by vague terror, or at any rate touched with awe from presences of Nature in the sky, or on the earth ; from ‘visions of the hills,’ and ‘souls of lonely places,’ his imagination was not left uninfluenced by the two great stimulants of reverence and fear ; by emotions which, to use his own words,

Impressed upon all forms the characters  
Of danger and desire,  
And thus did make  
The surface of the universal earth,  
With triumph and delight, with hope and fear,  
Work like a sea.

There is a magnificent description of the feelings engendered in his mind by the life he led, and the imaginative loneliness of spirit in which he indulged himself, without having, as would have been the case at Eton, to stay afterwards :—

‘One summer evening’ (Book I. line 355, down to ‘and were a trouble to my dreams’). I refer you to this passage without quoting it at length here, because I shall want to do that on a future occasion.

This was the manner in which Cumberland educated her poet-child for Cambridge, with small promise of a Senior Wranglership or a Chancellor’s medal, I must admit. Not a good education, certainly, for these days of competitive examination ; for average boys, possibly, not a good education at any time. Though I daresay Wordsworth’s companions grew up into a resolute and stalwart manhood enough ; and may, with time given them, have played their parts reasonably well in an England that then looked to something else than a stall-fed memory as the one infallible preparation for life. At any rate, whatever may be the value of our existing Chinese system for the rank and file of each generation, that Wordsworth escaped it altogether, God be praised ! That future Wordsworths may also escape it, when their time comes, let us devoutly hope ! This is a prayer in which the Civil Service examiners themselves will not, I am sure, refuse to join.

## LECTURE II.

'THE PRELUDE' ETC.—*continued.*

WORDSWORTH the Cantab presents himself to us as quite a different person from Wordsworth the Hawkshead schoolboy. He describes the change that has taken place with some humour, and with a sincerity as if he were in a confessional. Among other quaint instances of his amusement and perplexity under this new aspect of life, which might be given if it were worth while, we learn how his introduction to the University affected him from the following lines:—

Questions, directions, warnings, and advice,  
Flowed in upon me from all sides, fresh day  
Of pride and pleasure. To myself, I seemed  
A man of business and expense, and went  
From shop to shop about my own affairs,  
To tutor, or to tailor, as befel.

As if the change  
Had waited on some fairy's wand, at once  
Behold me rich in monies, and attired  
In splendid garb, with hose of silk—and hair  
Powdered like rimey trees when frost is keen.

There were many things certain to interest Wordsworth in Cambridge, and upon such topics he touches with all his usual power. The window through which

When from my pillow, looking forth by light  
Of moon and favouring stars, I could behold  
The ante-chapel where the statue stood  
Of Newton, with his prism and silent face,  
The marble index of a mind, for ever  
Voyaging through strange seas of thought, alone.

The reminiscences of Chaucer in ‘The Hawthorn Shade, beside the pleasant mill of Trumpington,’ also came back to him, though not exactly the same in kind. I think Wordsworth was quite right in ‘laughing with Chaucer.’ A poet who has to deal with the whole of human nature ought not to be prudish. At the same time, to call the story to which he refers ‘A Tale of Amorous Passion,’ is certainly making the best of things. It would have given the admirable Bowdler no end of trouble to file down the narrative in question into a fitness for lying upon a drawing-room table.

Again, he dwells with proper zeal on the memory

Of that gentle bard,  
Chosen by the Muses for their page of state—  
Sweet Spenser, moving through his clouded heaven  
With the moon’s beauty, and the moon’s soft pace ;—  
Of our blind poet, who in his later day  
Stood almost single, uttering odious truth—  
Darkness before, and danger’s voice behind.

Such associations worked with their full effect on the fresh and untarnished mind of the boy-poet. Nay, even setting these shadowy impressions aside, the general spirit of his new home, the traditional glories hanging over every corner of that venerable place, and breathing forth influences scarcely to be resisted by anyone within their reach, could not fail to arrest his attention and touch his heart :—

He could not print  
Ground, where the grass had yielded to the steps  
Of generations of illustrious men,  
Unmoved, he could not always lightly pass  
Through the same gateways, sleep where they had slept,  
Wake where they waked, range that enclosure old,  
The garden of great intellects, undisturbed.

Still, after making every allowance for what he thus gained, after admitting freely that he could not behold with undelighted mind

So many happy youths, so wide and fair  
A congregation in its budding time  
Of health and beauty ; could not see unmoved  
That miscellaneous garland of wild flowers,  
Decking the matron temples of a place  
So famous through the world.

We feel that in spite of these tributes to its memory, Wordsworth did not like Cambridge. Directly, at any rate, he profited little by it, as we can judge ; nor did he look back in after years upon his residence there with any special tenderness or affection. He felt

A strangeness in the mind,  
A feeling that he was not for that hour,  
Nor for that place.

No high emotion, derived from a thirst for living praise, and from a fit reverence for the noble dead, ever touched him at all—at least, so as to act upon his character materially. No enthusiasm was awakened strong enough to shake the stability of those foundations on which his original genius was beginning to build itself up.

Indeed, if we content ourselves with plain fact—with the unadorned truth of the case, in sonorous blank verse, extending over many pages, he tells us little else than this, that he was not a reading man. There is, I may say, no great reason to wish that he had been. Mountain torrents have other work in the world than to supply manufactories or fill kettles ; reservoirs and pumps are good enough for these ordinary transactions. Medallists and wranglers are, no doubt, eminent and valuable men. Still, medallists and wranglers you can have for the asking year after year. But a ruined Wordsworth is a loss not to be repaired. Such a loss would have left a gap in Nature, and if Cambridge had been powerful enough to dwarf or distort the pre-ordained growth of his faculties, Wordsworth might thus have been ruined.

The youth who from Nature and her overflowing sources had

received so much, that 'all his thoughts were steeped in feeling,' who had stood—

If the night blackened with the coming storm,  
And drank in visionary power . . . .  
Beneath some rock, listening to tones that are  
The ghostly language of the ancient earth.

Who says of himself—

A track pursuing, not untrod before.  
To every natural form, fruit, rock, and flower,  
I gave a moral life, I saw them feel,  
Or linked them to some feeling ; the great mass  
Lay bedded in a quickening soul, and all  
That I beheld respiration with inward meaning.

A young man such as this, it is obvious, was not fitted to fight hard for University prizes, or to make a high place upon the Tripos, with a fellowship to follow, the engrossing hope of his life. We all remember, I make no doubt, Mazepa's horse—

In the full foam of wrath and dread,  
To me the desert-born was led ;  
In truth he was a matchless steed,  
A Tartar of the Ukraine breed,  
Who looked as though the speed of thought  
Were in his limbs ; but he was wild,  
Wild as the wild deer and untaught. . . .  
'Twas but a day since he was caught.

Such an untamed and untameable courser would have been as much at home among the sleek well-groomed animals of Rotten Row, as Wordsworth was among the public school ambitions and conventional anticipations of the future, urging on every right-minded undergraduate whom he met. He hated everything artificial, still more everything like restraint, rightly perhaps, for he was no hot-house plant, and as the ballad sings :—

For the tender beech and the sapling oak,  
That grow by the shadowy rill,  
You may cut down both at a single stroke,  
You may cut down which you will ;

But this you must know, that as long as they grow,  
Whatever change may be,  
You never can teach, either oak or beech,  
To be aught but a greenwood tree.

Here, however, he found himself for the first time in his life entangled in formalities, and subject to restraint. For instance, he hated going to chapel—a practice against which he inveighs with somewhat fierce and one-sided emphasis. Whether the restraint being the same, if a simple absence, as we call it at Eton, had been substituted for the religious formality that revolted him, he would have been better pleased, I cannot say. Altogether, it is a relief to get him away from Cambridge ; where, perhaps, the most notable fact recorded is, that finding himself in the room associated with the name of Milton, he tossed off bumper after bumper to the memory of that illustrious man, the soberest of mortals, until, for the first and last time in his life, he got drunk, and staggered into chapel, half proud of the impulse to which he had yielded, though half ashamed of the result :—

Oh ! temperate Bard !  
Be it confessed that, for the first time seated  
Within thy innocent lodge and oratory,  
One of a festive circle, I poured out  
Libations to thy memory ; drank till pride  
And gratitude grew dizzy in a brain  
Never excited by the fumes of wine  
Before that hour or since, &c. &c.

We must not, however, think too much of this dithyrambic exploit. A worthy clerical friend of mine, one of the best poetical critics I know, and also one of the soundest judges of port wine, always shakes his head about it, and says: ‘Wordsworth’s intentions were good, no doubt, but I greatly fear that his standard of intoxication was miserably low.’

In the fourth book Wordsworth relates how he returned to Hawkshead. He tells us again and again how his deeper

nature broke through the thin crust of alien habits, through the forced submission to alien circumstances, and shook off the torpor laid upon it by a depressing and uncongenial atmosphere. This book, however, and the seventh, entitled ‘Residence in London,’ interest us less than the three first. Fine passages are not wanting, and the pure beautiful English, which makes everything written by Wordsworth so valuable to a student of our language, flows on like a pellucid stream. Nay, besides this, ever and anon, half-buried thoughts and feelings, all the while shaping his character, though doing their work in silence, rise to the surface and sweep away the film of new ice that was beginning to press them down, with more than their usual force. Take, for instance, the splendid description of a ‘Summer Dawn,’ and the profound effect thereby produced upon him, after a night spent in rustic revelry :—

Ere we retired  
 The cock had crowed, and now the eastern sky  
 Was kindling, not unseen, from humble copse  
 And open field, through which the path-way wound  
 And homeward led my steps. Magnificent  
 The morning rose, in memorable pomp,  
 Glorious as e'er I had beheld. In front  
 The sea lay laughing in the distance ; near  
 The solid mountains shone, bright as the clouds,  
 Grain-tinctured, drenched in empyrean light.  
 And in the meadows, and the lower grounds,  
 Was all the sweetness of a common dawn ;  
 Dews, vapours, and the melody of birds,  
 And labourers going forth to till the fields.  
 Ah ! need I say, dear friend, that to the brim  
 My heart was full ? I made no vow, but vows  
 Were then made for me : bond unknown to me  
 Was given, that I should be—else sinning greatly—  
 A dedicated spirit. . . . .

The one new element introduced into his mind about this time, I take to have been the sentimental element. The love of Nature, originally a simple instinct, an influence streaming in through every pore, until his whole being was saturated with

happiness and light, began to be reacted upon from within. The landscape, seen at first in its native colours and not otherwise, had now to pass as it were through tinted glass, clothing itself, accordingly, with an aspect not altogether its own. This self-surrender to the dreams of a wayward fancy did not last long. ‘Plain imagination and severe’ was the guide finally preferred by him. Still, we may conclude that as no wave breaks even against a granite headland without an effect which, combining with a series of other similar effects, produces in the long run a permanent alteration, so also this tide of imaginative sensitiveness did not beat against Wordsworth’s mind so ineffectually as to leave no result behind it. There is a fine poem of his on ‘Yew Trees,’ written in the first years of the century, which shows how, when the occasion justified it, Wordsworth could recall these dormant elements and employ them with remarkable intensity and power :—

But worthier still of note  
 Are those fraternal Four of Borrowdale,  
 Joined in one solemn and capacious grove ;  
 Huge trunks !—and each particular trunk a growth  
 Of intertwined fibres serpentine,  
 Up-coiling, and inveterately convolved,—  
 Nor uninformed with Phantasy, and looks  
 That threaten the profane ;—a pillared shade,  
 Upon whose grassless floor of red-brown hue,  
 By sheddings from the pining umbrage tinged  
 Perennially—beneath whose sable roof  
 Of boughs, as if for festal purpose, decked  
 With unrejoicing berries, ghostly Shapes  
 May meet at noon tide—Fear and trembling Hope,  
 Silence and Foresight—Death the Skeleton  
 And Time the Shadow,—there to celebrate,  
 As in a natural temple scattered o'er  
 With altars undisturbed of mossy stone,  
 United worship ; or in mute repose  
 To lie, and listen to the mountain flood  
 Murmuring from Glaramara’s inmost caves.

This new element, carrying into the heart of Nature a sym-

pathy derived from the study of mankind and the play of life and passion, disposes the poet to consider, as next in order, the depositories of all that is highest in human expression ; the accumulated record of man's thought, of man's creative and imaginative faculties. Accordingly, he devotes the fifth subdivision of this great work to the subject of Books.

Books of poetry and mathematical treatises constitute, apparently for Wordsworth, all that is of lasting value ; all, the loss of which would be absolutely disastrous and without remedy. As for the numberless other printed volumes, such as, according to Charles Lamb, no gentleman's library should be without, he treats them cavalierly enough.

Wordsworth begins his discourse on this important matter by relating a dream which had surprised him whilst reading by the sea shore; a dream built up out of some haunting fancies, as to the perishable nature of those registers wherein are lodged the great thoughts, the great discoveries, and other intellectual achievements of the past :—

A thought is with me sometimes, and I say,  
Should the whole frame of earth by inward throes  
Be wrenched ; or fire come down from far, to scorch  
Old Ocean, in his bed left singed and bare ;  
Yet would the living Presence still subsist  
Victorious, and composure would ensue,  
And kindlings like the morning.

So far so good :—

But all the adamantine holds of truth,  
The consecrated works of bard or sage,  
Sensuous, or intellectual, wrought by man,  
Where would they be ?

Under the pressure of this melancholy question, he then falls asleep and slides into a dream. Now the verse-makers are numberless to whom such visions have been vouchsafed—in pen and ink. But Wordsworth was so sincere and genuine a man that everything actually took place, I am persuaded, just as it

is set down. He dreams, then, that an Arab of the Desert, mounted on a dromedary, rushes past him, holding in one hand a stone, as the symbol of mathematical, in the other a shell, as the symbol of poetical, power. His desire is to bury both stone and shell somewhere out of the reach of a ruinous deluge close at hand; whether he succeeds or not cannot now be ascertained. The last that Wordsworth sees of him is this:—

He, with his twofold charge  
Still in his grasp, before me in full view,  
Went hurrying o'er the illimitable waste,  
With the fleet waters of a drowning world  
In chase of him;—whereat I waked in terror. . .

We may well agree with Wordsworth's studious friend, to whom he imparted his apprehensions, that this is 'going far to seek disquietude ;' though it cannot be denied that the mind of man has dwelt upon such terrible pictures often enough, long before Wordsworth was born. 'The Legend of the Lost Island Atlantis,' the theory put forward by Plato, apart from, and in addition to, this legend, that, at certain revolutions, the whole earth is given over to fire, to flood, to earthquake, or some other world-wide convulsion ; and that the human race has had to rise up renewed over and over again, out of barbarous mountain tribes, or the like miserable relics of the past;—these, and other such speculative fancies, whether growing out of some faint, but unforgotten tradition, or whether merely imagined, must recur to everyone's memory.

They probably helped to colour Wordsworth's musings, as he brooded over the possibility of such abnormal catastrophes ; they probably helped afterwards to shape the dream wherein he beheld such a ruin actually bearing down upon him, and noted the precise moment of its arrival.

There is, however, another conceivable form of evil threatening, or at least tending to threaten, all the splendid accumulations of those years that are behind us ; and on this Words-

worth makes no comment. I trust that it is hardly more likely to crush our present system than any chance collision of the earth with a comet, or any outburst of malignant eccentricity on the part of the sun, such as certain astronomers blandly look forward to and predict. Still, if we are to calculate contingencies thus remote, it is a menace, I think, at least as formidable as those physical aberrations and cataclysms that weighed so heavily upon Wordsworth's imagination. The destructive agent to which I refer, is the spirit of democratic envy, raised to its highest point and intoxicated by some sudden, unexpected, and universal triumph. That spirit, appearing in its worst form, and armed with a power not to be withheld, might show itself more overwhelming than the waters of the great deep, more implacable than any fire sent down from heaven, to wither in a day what mankind has wrought for itself by continuous effort out of countless ages. Happily for us, the English people, not being a vain people, nor one given over to bitter egotism, is comparatively untainted by this poison in the blood. Nay, even in other countries, where the disease is perhaps more virulent, we may hope that the sounder and finer national qualities will prevail over it in the long run. Still, when we see how often men, infected by this baneful spirit, are driven mad as it were by its venomous influence, so that they run on with the slaver of jealous hatred on their lips, snapping to the right hand and to the left hand, at every form of recognised superiority—when we see how this grudging temper, though it may begin, perhaps, more pardonably in the denunciation of mere rank or mere wealth, tends more and more to resent intellectual gifts, profounder wisdom, even superior virtue (as if such distinctions were an oppression and an insult to ordinary men),—I confess that the prospect of the future is not, in my eyes, a cheerful one. We cannot but remember how the orthodox civic austerity of the first French Revolution refused a day's grace to Lavoisier, intent upon scientific discoveries to

him more precious than life, because, forsooth, true patriots needed no such superfine addition to Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. Even in this country, the disposition on the part of our working classes to prevent a man of ability and energy from taking his own course lest he should earn more or rise higher than his stupid and indolent companions, strikes me as ominous of evil; and I must acknowledge that if great names are to be obliterated, and the achievements of genius cancelled, I am much more afraid of a moral earthquake, of a living deluge from that great abyss beneath the smiling surfaces of modern life, of a volcanic upheaval of barbarism from below, than of any physical portents or prodigies such as Wordsworth dreamed of. These, however, are speculations not of immediate interest. We must be content with hoping, even if our street Arabs eventually conquer us, that they will not set about burning Alexandrian or British Museum libraries, after the manner of their Eastern predecessors.

Returning to Wordsworth's account of books and theories of education, it is pleasant to see how genius and common sense unite, and arm him as it were with a two-handed sword, to strike down the champions of a plan for educating—hardly boys and girls—little lay figures rather, able to eat and drink and talk, certainly to talk. A plan that came into fashion some sixty or seventy years ago, and, even now, is not as much discredited as one could wish. You of a younger generation can hardly realise the intense hatred with which all right-hearted children of my time regarded Harry and Lucy, and those other little prigs, gathering buttercups—I beg their pardon, ranunculos—something or other, under the eye of an omniscient tutor, in '*Evenings at Home*.' I can only say, that having been robbed, at one period of my life, of the '*Arabian Nights*,' and '*Robinson Crusoe*,' and fastened down to these quasi-scientific dogmas in exchange, I have been imbued with an unjust prejudice against many respectable plants ever since. Papilionaceous flowers, in

particular, I have always regarded as personal enemies. The true answer to all the nonsense talked about useful knowledge is now obvious enough ; it has almost become a truism, on the other side. But there can be no doubt, I think, that the earliest form and the most effective form of this unanswerable answer—this '*réponse sans replique*,' is to be assigned—I had almost said, is to be scored, to Wordsworth in 'The Prelude.' As the keen though not unkindly banterer of unfortunate urchins, trimmed and dwarfed into premature wisdom, like those Chinese oaks and pines, that by some mysterious process are stunted and drugged into early perfection (a perfection that never overflows the limits of a flowerpot), he displays powers not often exercised by him. Powers they are, which prove that, as a satirical poet of the highest order—a satirist, I mean, not condescending to personal invective or superficial fashions ; but attentive only to matters of high and lasting importance—he might have attained to unquestionable eminence. He shows also, by his utterances here how deep an insight into the truth was his, when any great problem of human nature was brought before him for consideration :—

This model of a child is never known  
To mix in quarrels—that were far beneath  
Its dignity. . . .

And natural or supernatural fear,  
Unless it leap upon him in a dream,  
Touches him not. To enhance the wonder, see  
How arch his notices, how nice his sense  
Of the ridiculous ; not blind is he  
To the broad follies of the licensed world.

. . . .  
A miracle of scientific lore,  
Ships he can guide across the pathless sea,  
And tell you all their cunning ; he can read  
The inside of the earth, and spell the stars ;  
He knows the policies of foreign lands.

. . . .  
He must live,  
Knowing that he grows wiser every day,  
Or else not live at all, and seeing, too,

Each little drop of wisdom as it falls  
 Into the dimpling cistern of his heart,  
 For this unnatural growth the trainer blame,  
 Pity the tree.

Oh give us once again the wishing cap  
 Of Fortunatus, and the invisible coat  
 Of Jack the Giant-Killer, Robin Hood,  
 And Sabra in the Forest with St. George.  
 The child whose love is here, at least does reap  
 One precious good—that he forgets himself.

This passage, touched as it is with a flavour of wholesome bitterness, is eminently interesting and eminently wise. It is moreover, so far as I know, the first distinct protest against those Aikens's and Edgeworth's,<sup>1</sup> who, deceived by their own fluent plausibilities, set themselves to the unpromising task of reaping corn fit to make bread, and gathering ripe fruit, in the early spring. The great aspiring faculties of wonder and reverence, together with the great creative faculty of the imagination, are apt to sicken and wither away, unless cultivated at the proper season. We know now that when Mirabeau said of Barnard, ‘C'est un arbre qui *croît* pour être, un jour, mât de vaisseau,’ he was not speaking of a man who had been educated, before his time, into diminutive symmetry and premature perfection. Such an oak is meant to bear his acorns as Nature had decreed ; and then, well ribbed up into the sides of a seventy-four, to resist hostile cannon-balls. But this sort of knowledge we owe, in no small degree, to Wordsworth, and to the men whom Wordsworth influenced.

In the next book Wordsworth recounts his visit to the Alps. We should have fancied that the impression upon his mind would have been deeper than it is, and the results of that impression more valuable ; but, somehow or other, we are disappointed. Poet of Nature as Wordsworth was—professionally

<sup>1</sup> Of course I am not speaking of Miss Edgeworth as a novelist.

so we may say—there is nothing of his here on a level with Coleridge's ‘Sunrise Hymn in the Vale of Chamounix.’ Nay, when Wordsworth honours Mont Blanc by mentioning it, he merely gives utterance to a feeling well known to his readers, namely, ‘You, being William Wordsworth, when you supplant the imaginative dream; created by yourself and cherished by yourself, of any place, either famous from natural or romantic associations by actually beholding it, lose more than you gain ; inasmuch as the reality disturbs the vision, and is a poor substitute for it.’ This refinement may, perhaps, not be always wholly false ; but it strikes ordinary ‘Christians and eaters of beef’ as somewhat morbid and fantastical. After all, it was God, I suppose, who created the Alps, and they have hitherto ranked among His successful operations.

That very day  
 From a bare ridge, we also first beheld,  
 Unveiled, the summit of Mont Blanc, and grieved  
 To have a soulless image on the eye,  
 Usurping on a living thought—a thought  
 That never more could be.

Soon, however, the Vale of Chamounix repaid our travellers for the dethronement of their ideal Mont Blanc, and is finely described.

The wondrous vale  
 Of Chamounix stretched far below, and soon,  
 With its dumb cataracts, and streams of ice,  
 A motionless array of mighty waves ;  
 Five rivers broad and deep, made rich amends,  
 And reconciled us to realities.

In spite, however, of Chamounix, he seems to have felt more love for the milder beauty and brighter colouring around the Italian lakes, than for the solemn glaciers and rugged precipices of the higher Alps. There is a very fine passage, narrating how he and his friend, deceived by irrelevant foreign clocks, went out into the massive forests about the town of Gravedona, in the belief that dawn was at hand.

We left the town  
 Of Gravedona, with this hope, but soon  
 Were lost, bewildered among woods immense,  
 And on a rock sate down to wait for day.  
 An open place it was, and overlooked  
 From high, the sullen water far beneath,  
 On which a dull red image of the moon  
 Lay bedded, changing often times its form  
 Like an uneasy snake. From hour to hour  
 We sate and sate, wondering, as if the night  
 Had been ensnared by witchcraft. On the rock  
 At last we stretched our weary limbs for sleep,  
 But *could not* sleep.

The cry of unknown birds,  
 The mountains, more by blackness visible,  
 And their own size, than any outward light ;  
 The breathless wilderness of clouds ; the clock  
 That told, with unintelligible voice,  
 The widely-parted hours ; the noise of streams,  
 And sometimes rustling motions nigh at hand, &c.

In this gloomy resting-place, a prey to that indescribable feeling called by Walter Scott ‘eeriness,’ (that is, to get as near as we can, superstitious depression dominating the nerves, in defiance both of man’s reason and his will,) these two Englishmen waited wearily for sunrise. To judge from what has been given us, whatever befell his companion, Wordsworth himself carried away from that summer night’s watching more food for his imagination than from any other natural influence encountered by him in his Alpine tour. From any other natural influence, I say—I confine myself to that; because Wordsworth then first hailed, as a stimulus and a tonic, the rising breeze of the French Revolution.

I know of no book that brings before our eyes, with more liveliness and truth than this ‘Prelude,’ the happy delirium of that marvellous time.

For Europe in those days was thrilled with joy,  
 France standing on the top of golden hours—

So that human nature seemed, as it were, to be born again.

We can see with our own eyes, after reading this book, what we have hitherto known only as a fact. We can actually make a picture for ourselves, from Wordsworth's verses, of the intense anger and mortification with which Burke's warnings and prophecies, breaking in upon this rapturous exultation, like some funereal bell into the middle of a wedding feast, were received and resisted by all men, especially by the young. Carlyle has, no doubt, painted for us the French Revolution from the life with wonderful force ; but, not to mention the contemptuous sarcasm underlying the movements of his pencil, he is a spectator only, and a spectator from a distance.

Wordsworth was an actor on the stage, a sharer in all those theatrical hopes and pleasures. He was, moreover, when he surrendered himself to these glorious self-deceptions, in the first freshness of youth. There was nothing then but flowers and garlands, and moonlight dances in the open air, to the honour of Liberty.

Unhoused beneath the evening star, we saw  
Dances of Liberty, and in late hours  
Of darkness, dances in the open air,  
Deftly prolonged, though grey-haired lookers on  
Might waste their breath in chiding.

The French Revolution was felt as a balmy breeze, just strong enough to make the waters ripple and the blossoms laugh in the sun. No one, except Burke, discerned in it the first breath of a hurricane, destined, not only to shake down flowers and fruits, but also to uproot the trees of the forest, and send 'temple and tower to the ground.' Wordsworth returned to France, as I have said, and took up his residence there for many months, in a more ominous season. The history of his feelings then (and to them I shall come back by-and-by) is at least as interesting as any part of the book ; though his description of them is somewhat more bitterly written, and tinged with gloomier colouring than of old. Between his first and his second landing in France, however, two books are inter-

posed, one entitled ‘Residence in London,’ the other ‘Retrospect,’ and on both of these it is perhaps desirable to touch in passing. The Life in London is not one of the most important parts of the poem. It gives a diffuse account, in pompous blank verse that is hardly poetry, of matters very little worth recording, either in poetry or in prose. For instance, we have described for us, at a length quite unnecessary, the transactions of Bartholomew Fair. Nor does he seem, as far as we know, to have mingled at all with the leaders of the time. His descriptions of the Law Courts, of the Parliament, of the fashionable preacher, are of little merit. His satire, when he satirises, is languid; his life without interest, and his narrative dull. If there had been nothing better in ‘The Prelude’ than this, it would not have been within a hundred miles of Cowper’s ‘Task.’ Altogether, this part of his career is the reverse of satisfactory. He seems, moreover, to suffer in mind; whether from the pressure of private sorrow, or from disappointment at the turn public affairs were taking, I do not know.

After spending a year in London, without much profit or pleasure, he proceeds to France once more, and becomes again a sharer in the hopes and fears, in the dangers and triumphs, of the great Revolution. It would seem, however, that either this latter half of ‘The Prelude’ must have rushed along at railroad speed; or that the present arrangement is not conclusive as to the order in which the books were written. We are told that the poem, begun in 1799, was finished in 1805, yet this seventh book (there are in all fourteen) begins as follows:—

Six changeful years have vanished since I first  
Poured forth, saluted by the evening breeze,  
A glad preamble to this verse.

We may suppose, indeed, if we please, that after having roughly finished his task, he then revised the whole, and that the passage here referred to was then introduced for the first time. It is not a matter of great importance, except that if he did

revise his work, I think it would have enhanced the interest of the poem if this seventh book and the next also had been placed somewhere else. We should then have had his accounts of France, and of the influence she exercised upon him, growing together with the growth and progress of the Revolution, as a continuous interest, a narrative without a break. Now this seventh book, containing the somewhat commonplace account of a somewhat commonplace life in London, and the eighth book, full of beauty no doubt, but of a beauty that might have been given to the world in some other form, are thrust in between his first and his second visit to the Continent. Great part of the eighth book, entitled 'Retrospect,' is devoted to the calling of the shepherd—an employment always stimulating Wordsworth's imagination to a degree hardly conceivable by us who live 'in populous cities pent.' His praise of shepherds, however, in 'Retrospect,' though I think it somewhat encumbers and retards the march of 'The Prelude,' is very interesting in one respect. I frankly confess that I do not belong to the first and highest order of Wordsworthians. I am an admirer but not a worshipper. There are some men who cling to him with a sort of Tichborne faith ; who think that there is no poem of his, no stanza, no line almost, but what is 'discreetest, wisest, virtuousest, best.' To this faith I have no great objection, so far as it honours Wordsworth ; but I do object to it when it tends, as it does tend, to the depreciation of others—the poets of passion, and, if I may venture upon the expression, of pace—the poets whose chariot wheels get hot with driving, like Byron, and Campbell, and Scott. In the meantime, my original sentence has sunk itself in this quagmire of a parenthesis, and I must turn back to extricate it. 'Retrospect,' therefore, as I have just said, or rather was just beginning to say, is very interesting to me, on account of the melody of its versification. One of my heresies with regard to Wordsworth is this :—that excellent as his style and diction may be, he is not usually a

great master of metrical effects. There is hardly any ring in his verses. His method is cold and unelastic, without pulsation or thrill in it. Here, however, whilst he is speaking of the shepherd's life—whilst he runs through all its varieties, from the days of Theocritus down to our own time—he seems, like the Roman orator of old, to draw to himself a spirit of modulation from the pipes behind that are ever sounding in his ears. Their unseen harmonies hang over the pauses of his verse, and enrich it with a grace that we have often missed and often longed for, even whilst reading his highest poetry:—

Smooth life had flock and shepherd in old time,  
Long springs and tepid winters, on the banks  
Of Delicate Galesus ; and no less  
Those scattered along Adria's myrtle shores.  
Smooth life had herdsman, and his snow-white herd  
To triumphs and to sacrificial rites  
Devoted, on the inviolable stream  
Of rich Clitumnus ; and the goat-herd lived  
As calmly, underneath the pleasant brows  
Of cool Lucretilis, where the pipe was heard  
Of Pan, invisible God, thrilling the rocks  
With tutelary music, from all harm  
The flock protecting, &c. &c.

I stop here, but I need not do so, as page after page is marked by the same liquid ease and fluency, tending to show that if Wordsworth sometimes failed in melody, it was not because the gift was out of his reach, but because he neglected it for the sake of other aims that appeared to him higher and nobler. And here we must all admit that Wordsworth was a thoroughly original poet, endowed with a peculiar genius and a special organisation, entitling him above all men to compose what is understood by the poetry of thought. But unless a man is very sure that he possesses an organisation of the same kind, he had better, perhaps, accept Milton's view of poetry, that it ought to be 'simple, sensuous, and passionate.' Philosophy should walk with steadiness. At times it may even leap up

and climb the heights of reason, but it is not expected to dance or to sing. Doctor Darwin, moreover—the great authority, as we are told, on human nature at present—believes that all music and rhythm sprang out of the impulses and inward struggles of half-human courtship ; that the first eruption of language was a kind of rude love-song ; if so, he would seem to agree with Milton, that the earliest fountain-head of poetry was not thought, but passion.

Now when Darwin and Milton, starting from such opposite quarters, come thus to an unexpected agreement, they surely are worth listening to. Accordingly, whilst we go on admiring this true poet, in spite of his egotism—in spite of the arid deserts of prosaic discussion—mixed up with those grander elements that ensure lasting honour to ‘The Prelude,’ we cannot at times refrain from wishing, ungrateful as it may be, that he had been less didactic, less intent upon searching his own heart ; that he had devoted himself, whilst in the plenitude of his power, to some one of the subjects referred to in the first book. Oh that ‘the ambitious power of choice,’ to use his own words, had settled on some British theme—‘some old romantic tale,’ such as the story of Arthur, ‘by Milton left unsung,’ or upon the Legend of Mithridates, deified as Odin, and pouring down from the ‘frozen loins of the North’ his avenging multitude of warriors upon an exhausted and demoralised Rome. Any one of the subjects that he thus names might have given him an opening for the exhibition, on a larger scale, of such dramatic power as is shown in ‘The Brothers,’ and for a more various and more exciting music in the verse, than we are commonly indulged with.

Enough, however, of this. Wordsworth in the seventh and eighth books having recapitulated most of the topics before touched upon, more particularly shepherd life, and the sterner aspects of London, hesitates for a moment ; but soon is drawn back, as it were by a kind of magnetic sympathy, into the irre-

sistible Maelstrom of the French Revolution. At first, indeed, he was a spectator and nothing more. His enthusiasm was factitious. Even the relics of the Bastile, though, as the friend of humanity, he felt bound to pocket some of them, awakened no real interest in his mind. He affected, as he tells us plainly, more enthusiasm than he felt. Having passed through Paris, he takes up his abode in a pleasant town,

Washed by the current of the stately Loire,  
There unmoved,  
I stood, 'mid these concussions unconcerned,  
Tranquil almost and careless as a flower,  
Glassed in a greenhouse, or a parlour shrub,  
That spreads its leaves in unmolested peace,  
When every bush and tree the country through  
Is shaking to its roots.

A strange indifference, and one that could not last. Very soon he began to share the passions, the hopes, the dreams of Frenchmen, as a Frenchman. The terrible intensity of the times passed into his blood, and he became what he calls a patriot—that is to say, a man possessed by a fanatical zeal for the country with which our Mother England was then wrestling for her life. We may here remark that there is a strange want of consistency between this distorted patriotism—a patriotism of which Wordsworth, so far as he tells us, never repented to the day of his death—and the admiration, nay the absolute reverence, expressed for Burke in a former book.

Genius of Burke—forgive the pen seduced  
By specious wonders. . . .  
Sofie (say at once a foward multitude)  
Murmur (for truth is hated where not loved),  
As the winds fret within the Æolian cave,  
Galled by their monarch's chain.

*Prelude*, Book vii.

Of these some, Wordsworth, to judge by his bitter invectives against the government of his country—invectives never withdrawn or even modified, was apparently one. At any rate,

these encomiums are not reconcilable with the revolutionary sympathies of the ninth and tenth books. We know from the Sonnet of 1802—

We all are with you *now* from shore to shore—

that Wordsworth in that year was graciously pleased to admit the impossibility of peace, and to acknowledge that Napoleon, the rebellious child of that democracy which the Bard of Rydal had lately been worshipping, was not likely to bring back, on the edge of his bayonets, the golden age. Even then, however, I cannot understand how the Wordsworth of the ninth and tenth books of 'The Prelude' could have written seven lines about Burke such as I have just quoted. He adopts, as we shall see directly, the conventional phrases, and indulges in the wild anticipations of those very men, against whom Burke's heaviest thunderbolts have been launched. We know that the antagonists of Burke have replied, not without effect. In truth, there is a short but powerful criticism upon him, philosopher and statesman as he was, that still presses for an answer. Mr. Burke 'pitied the plumage, but he forgets the dying bird.' This terrible apothegm involves for us, even now, a question touching the roots of life. We may acquiesce in the evils of society as in a state of things inseparable from the gifts of our gloomy and crowded civilisation ; as their purchase-money in fact ; but it is the acquiescence of despair, not of contentment. Because much that we see fills us with dismay, we cannot therefore turn back the march of history. We feel, we have been taught, indeed, by this very French Revolution that changes in the outward form of government can do but little to promote the public good ; that the power of tradition and custom is great, and not easily to be trampled under foot ; that happiness, in truth, must come to us mainly, if it comes at all, from within and not from without. Still, in spite of Burke and all his wisdom, to many of my generation it appears as if the times were big with ominous change, as if this, our era of

humanity, was coming to an end ; whilst the aspects of the future are shapeless, uncertain, and alarming. It is of course well for men not to relax their efforts, to make head against the dangers which threaten, or seem to threaten, us from day to day. I trust that much, that enough, may still be done ; but certainly we have no time to lose. There are moments, indeed, when I cannot but remember a painful story of the Alps. You have all heard of it, I make no doubt. You have heard how an Alpine hunter, searching among the mountain clefts to find out why the stream, that hitherto had fed his valley with life, was ceasing to flow, discovered that a barrier of ice had fallen across the river bed, high up among the crags. Against that barrier beat, in alliance with the summer sun, a lake ever rising higher as the fountains from above kept trickling down. He saw before him, therefore, a reservoir of ruin, waiting full of menace till the appointed instant came. The stalwart villagers laboured hard in their own defence. They cut a gallery here, and they cut a gallery there, and thus a certain amount of mischief was drained away. But the frail parapet that kept destruction back grew thinner and weaker from hour to hour, and long before their puny efforts had made any real impression upon the army of waters imprisoned within, that rocking rampart suddenly gave way, and everything within reach was buried at once beneath the pitiless outburst of devastation. We must hope and endeavour to be more fortunate than these Swiss herdsmen. We must try to cut our galleries through the icy mass that sunders from us, whilst it holds back for the moment, the ever-gathering flood of wrath and wretchedness, as it rises up against our present effeminate civilisation. We must endeavour to cut them neither too recklessly nor yet too languidly, so as to drain away all such threatening reservoirs of ruin before they overwhelm us for ever.

Meanwhile, returning to Wordsworth's eulogy on Burke, as Wordsworth cares nothing for the plumage, if we may revert to

that metaphor, and is entirely overmastered by his sympathies with the dying bird, this eulogy is quite out of keeping with the sentiments which he expresses, and apparently still adhered to even when he became old and a poet-laureate. He stands before us as a regular disciple of the French Revolution, and reconciled himself, like many other estimable men, to its darker features, by some general notions about Liberty and Progress; by the ever-recurring, but ever-defeated hope, that each new atrocity was certain to be the last; aye, and above all, for this is more than all, by

Not *caring* if the wind did now and then  
Blow *keen* upon an eminence, that gave  
So large a prospect to futurity.

I am not sure whether I interpret these lines rightly. If I do understand them, they seem much upon a level with Barrère's famous expression about the September massacres :— ‘Ce sang, étoit-il donc si pur?’ For this I am not blaming Wordsworth *much*. He partook of a sublime drunkenness, that for the moment was all but universal. Under this excitement, every minor interest, even the interest of his own country, was lost and swallowed up in a golden haze and fermentation of illimitable light. It is this vivid picture of the typical youth of the time that gives to these books of ‘The Prelude’ their permanent value. We see that the soberest intellects were driven wild, by a kind of oracular vapour like that of Delphi, rising, as we may say, out of the ground, and filling the souls of men with a madness wiser and truer, so at least they deemed it, than the ordinary wisdom of earth. It is, nevertheless, painful to reflect now, that in Wordsworth’s own case, one of the saddest consequences of party-spirit fell upon him. I mean that he rejoiced in the disasters and defeats of his own countrymen. It will be said, perhaps, that if our country is clearly in the wrong, reason, bare reason, may justify a man in this perverse exultation. Even reason, however, is not at her best

when she confines herself to the narrow limits of the present—not looking before or after. At any rate, right or wrong, I prefer those unreasoning instincts that lead men to stand, shoulder to shoulder, in defence of their national flag. I prefer the spirit of the republican Blake, serving under Cromwell, whom he regarded as a tyrant, against the enemies of England. I prefer, to the anti-English philanthropy of Wordsworth, the one generous impulse recorded of James II., who, when he saw the fortunes of his house, the hope of relief from humiliating dependence, the chances of an early restoration, broken down together by the defeat of the Spaniards at the Battle of the Dunes ; nevertheless, in that disastrous rout, cared, at the moment, for none of these things. No, he fixed his eyes upon Cromwell's contingent (upon a body of British seamen who, after sweeping everything before them, burst sword in hand into a redoubt, which had just been pronounced impregnable by the ablest engineers of Spain), and shouted aloud in irrepressible triumph—‘Look there ! Look there ! See how my brave English fight !’<sup>1</sup> It pains me, I repeat, that Wordsworth should have clung to these bitter decisions of his youth. But as, apparently, he did cling to them without repentance or shadow of turning, I cannot understand him when he eulogizes Burke ; inasmuch as the fierce desire in Wordsworth to see the blood of England poured out like water, and the honour of England trampled in the dust, was languid and irresolute, if compared with the angry demonism inspiring Burke to level his untiring blows at the heart of France. Burke, implacable in his hatred of those golden hours, as the poet calls them, would certainly not have agreed with Wordsworth, that, because according to the then laws of France, the father of a most contemptible young Frenchman, a certain Vaudracour, was enabled to detain his son in prison, lest he should embarrass the family

<sup>1</sup> See Macaulay's Essays.

by an unequal marriage, it was, therefore, just and expedient that the four corners of Europe should be set on fire.

Oh much have they to account for who could tear  
By violence, at one decisive rent,  
From the best youth of England their dear pride,  
Their joy in England.

Our rulers, this say truly, at that time  
Acted, or seemed to act at least, like men  
Thirsting to make the guardian crook of law  
A tool of murder.

As if their wish had been to undermine  
Justice, and make an end of liberty.

This is the tone in which the future poet-laureate speaks of what, I at least, have always been taught to consider a just, nay, an inevitable war. Proceedings, inveighed against by him, and unsuited, no doubt, to the ordinary tenour of our English life, are accounted for by the old maxim, ‘*Inter arma silent leges.*’ And if the lawless cruelty of the French Revolution seemed to him nothing worse than the accidental keenness of a refreshing and invigorating breeze, it may surely be said on our side, that we had no choice, when the vessel of the State was labouring in the storm, but to cut away any treacherous timbers that had parted from us—had thrown themselves, as it were, overboard, and were threatening, in alliance with that hostile tempest, to rush up and shatter the devoted ship. These matters, however, belong to the past. Both Wordsworth and Burke were great men, and it matters little now that they differed then, as youth naturally differs from age, about the French Revolution. What remains as really important to mankind, is that Wordsworth here records for us his feelings and impressions in immortal verse. ‘The word of the poet,’ so a high authority informs us, ‘lives longer than the deeds of other men.’ And, accordingly, the vivid photographs preserved

by Wordsworth ; first, of the loyal soldier, blighted by that dreadful season ; 2ndly, of the land—

That swarmed with passion, like a plain  
Devoured by locusts ;

3rdly, of his high-minded and enthusiastic friend, Beau-puis, sacrificing all the prejudices of his caste, and all the ties of friendship, to the welfare of mankind as he understood it. These pictures, I say, are destined to outlast the effect of battles and sieges, and to remain as an abiding presence before the memory of all future generations.

The later books, after the French Revolution is disposed of, treat, among other things, of his bitter disappointment at the failure of hopes so proudly entertained. His dream that he should see the man to come, ‘parted, as by a gulph,’ from him who had been, was rudely broken up. He still, indeed, strove to take pleasure in natural objects—in the winds and roaring waters ; the lights and shades,

That marched and counter-marched along the hills  
In glorious apparition.

But these pleasures were comparatively superficial—pleasures of the eye merely, whilst the inner faculties slept. The heart lay dead. By slow degrees, however, he recovered, as he tells us, peace of mind. And separating himself from all artificial things—from the worship of wealth, and the luxurious arts that weigh down the many, to pander to effeminate appetites in the few, he gave himself up to the study of his great object—the universal heart of man. These books are full of noble thoughts nobly expressed, and the poet takes leave of Coleridge, the brother of his soul, in this spirit of stately self-confidence :—

And now, oh Friend ! this history is brought  
To its appointed close ; the discipline  
And consummation of a Poet’s mind—

In everything that stood most prominent,  
Have faithfully been pictured ; we have reached  
The time, our guiding object from the first,  
When we may, not presumptuously, I hope,  
Suppose my powers so far confirmed, and such  
My knowledge, as to make me capable  
Of building up a work that shall endure.

In comparing this great poem with ‘The Excursion,’ we must bear in mind that it was left more or less unfinished and unrevised by its author. Here and there lines and passages seem somewhat roughly hewn, and a want of clearness, both in point of thought and of expression, is every now and then discernible : as if the manuscript had not been looked over when once copied.

If Wordsworth had chosen to give it to the world himself, I daresay it would have been partially remodelled and rearranged, possibly shortened. It is too long, no doubt, and must always be open to the objection that for a man, even a great man, to write a poem in fourteen books, all about himself, is a strong measure. Of this objection I myself think very little. Even in common life, egotists are often extremely agreeable men. People talk with so much more spirit, ease, and zeal about themselves than about things in general, that the manner of their conversation on this interesting topic often compensates for the matter. The real reason for disliking an egotist, I believe to be, that he preoccupies the ground—that his egotism, in a word, interferes with our own ; otherwise we should consider the hopes, fears, and interests of our neighbour, when imparted to us on his own, the highest, authority, at least as amusing as discussions about the weather and the crops.

It is also certain that the autobiography—that is, the printed and published egotism—of a very inferior man, provided it be candid and conscientious, always commands an attentive hearing. And, such being the case, it appears to me that the memorials of a great soul have at least as much claim upon

our indulgence as ‘The Memorials of a Quiet Life,’ or other such biographies and autobiographies. They interest me, I confess, not so much as perhaps they ought to ; I greatly prefer ‘The Prelude.’

The other continuous effort of Wordsworth’s poetical mind was, as I have just said, ‘The Excursion.’ This being so, I think ‘The Prelude’ stands above its rival in point of conception. In point of execution it is more unequal, as indeed we might expect from our knowledge that it never received the last touches and improvements of its author’s hand. But it is a more definite whole. It gives us a much deeper insight into Wordsworth’s own character, and leaves us much more certain that a purpose has been accomplished, than when we turn over the somewhat desultory pages of the sister poem. As to the comparative splendour of the great passages in these two poems, I am hardly prepared to pass a judgment, nor is it necessary to decide now whether the immense amount of thought and feeling, the treasures of imagination, and the general poetical power shown, might not, under other conditions, have done more for mankind—whether, in a word, the formal character of this self-imposed labour did not somewhat weary and exhaust the man who undertook it.

For my own part I cannot help expressing once more my regret that some one or other of the mighty tasks contemplated as his own (for so you will recollect he tells us) in the fresh youth of his ambition, never took shape, but remained as dreams and shadows till all was over.

He accomplished much in his later years, and for all that he has left behind him we are bound to be grateful ; but still, I doubt whether, as far as mere fame is concerned, his position before future ages as a great poet would not have been more distinct and resplendent, if he had never written another line after ‘The Prelude’ was completed, or at least after 1806. By that time ‘Tintern Abbey,’ ‘The Leech-gatherer,’ ‘The Brothers,’

'Ruth,' 'She was a Phantom of Delight,' 'The Platonic Ode,' the majority of the great Sonnets, and fifty other poems that need not be enumerated, had become enrolled among the immortal possessions of our English tongue.

Whether, however, Wordsworth was writing early or was writing late, this may be said of him, that throughout his career he looked upon poetry, not as a mere branch of polite literature—a passport to the idle applauses of unthinking men—but as an austere and sacred calling—a priesthood, that required him to devote all his faculties of body and mind to the service of truth—of beauty—and of God. To use his own words—

Never did I, in quest of right and wrong,  
Tamper with conscience from a private aim,  
Nor was in any public hope—the dupe  
Of selfish passion—nor did ever yield,  
Wilfully, to mean cares, or low pursuits.

Men of genius are comparatively common. But the man of genius who shapes his life according to this noble ideal is rare indeed, and we are bound to reverence him accordingly.

## LECTURE III.

## 'THE EXCURSION' ETC.

IN my last lecture I observed that the book called 'Memorials of a Quiet Life' had been one of the popular books of the last season. Against such books I have nothing to urge. They do not happen to interest me much, and of this particular book it may, I think, be said that the letters of the two worthy ladies which are preserved in it are not of remarkable excellence. Many women do write excellent letters ; not a few unknown Mesdames de Sevignés have wielded a pen that has only failed of attaining fame because it has not asked for it. Bundles of letters, not a few, that would have put to shame the mass of books printed whilst they were being written, have been flung carelessly into the fire, or are at this moment turning yellow in dusty desks, with the names of the dead engraven upon them. Any one of these bundles would probably excite at least as much interest as the book just mentioned. If this be so, I think it proves my point. It proves, I mean, that the egotism of a great soul, even though it takes up fourteen books of noble poetry, ought not to be too severely criticised by those who fight at the circulating library for the 'Egotism of a Quiet Life,' in two volumes of somewhat humdrum prose.

Leaving 'The Prelude' here then, and passing on to 'The Excursion,' it seems to me 'The Excursion' is very much 'The Prelude' over again, only in a looser and slacker form. It lacks the backbone of that sublime egotism, giving unity to

the earlier poem, giving it an original meaning, a progress, and an aim. The soul of the unparalleled Pedlar in 'The Excursion' has been shaped by exactly the same influences as the soul of the immortal Poet in 'The Prelude.' The great difference is that Wordsworth sings—chants, perhaps, is the better word—(so at least Coleridge tells us)

An Orphic song indeed,  
A song divine of high and passionate thoughts  
To their own music chanted ;

whilst the Pedlar undoubtedly preaches. When Wordsworth tells us what he himself has gone through, there is the colouring of absolute truth, the movement of genuine passion, in all his thoughts and words. Whilst, as to many parts of 'The Excursion,' the endless harangues of the mythical Scotchman, admirable in point of morality and generally fine specimens of philosophical rhetoric, are often, to my mind, scarcely poetry at all. To show what I mean by saying that in both cases the shaping influences were the same, let me read to you a very fine passage from 'The Excursion,' and compare it with one, to my mind, still finer from 'The Prelude.' Their purpose is to describe how these two separate minds were severally affected by the same spirit of Nature—that spirit of Nature deified by the ancients as the god Pan—the lord of mysterious and ineffable terrors, as well as of rural minstrelsies, and the simple pleasures belonging to mountain life.

From his sixth year, the Boy of whom I speak,  
In summer, tended cattle on the Hills;

From that bleak Tenement  
He, many an evening, to his distant home  
In solitude returning, saw the Hills  
Grow larger in the darkness, all alone  
Beheld the stars come out above his head,  
And travell'd through the wood, with no one near  
To whom he might confess the things he saw.  
So the foundations of his mind were laid.  
In such communion, not from terror free,

While yet a Child, and long before his time,  
 He had perceived the presence and the power  
 Of Greatness ; and deep feelings had impress'd  
 Great objects on his mind, with portraiture  
 And colour so distinct, that on his mind  
 They lay like substances, and almost seem'd  
 To haunt the bodily sense.

So much for the Pedlar. Now let us see how the mind of the Poet forms itself in 'The Prelude.'

One summer evening, led by her,<sup>1</sup> I found  
 A little boat, tied to a willow tree  
 Within a rocky cave—its usual home.  
 Straight I unloosed the chain, and stepping in  
 Pushed from the shore ; it was an act  
 Of stealth and troubled pleasure.

Not without the voice  
 Of mountain echoes did my boat move on,  
 Leaving behind her still, on either side,  
 Small circles glittering idly in the moon,  
 Until they melted all into one track  
 Of sparkling light. But now, like one who was  
 Proud of his skill, to reach a chosen point  
 With an unswerving line, I fixed my view  
 Upon the summit of a craggy ridge,  
 The Horizon's utmost boundary, for above  
 Was nothing but the stars, and the grey sky.  
 She was an elfin pinnace ; lustily  
 I dipped my oars into the silent lake,  
 And as I rose upon the stroke, my boat  
 Went heaving through the water like a swan ;  
 When from behind that craggy steep, till then  
 The Horizon's bound, a huge peak, black and huge,  
 As if with voluntary power instinct,  
 Upreared its head ; I struck, and struck again ;  
 And growing still in stature, the grim shape  
 Towered up between me and the stars, and still,  
 For so it seemed, with purpose of its own  
 And measured motion, like a living thing,  
 Strode after me.—*x. r. λ.*

Other passages abound, showing how identical the tone of

<sup>1</sup> Nature.

thought and feeling appears to be in both. But I need quote no more. The Pedlar repeats pretty much what Wordsworth has already said; only that a stronger feeling is awakened in me by the real than by the imaginary utterances. Wordsworth's plan, moreover, of exciting a factitious interest on behalf of his own shadow, is not particularly happy. The Pedlar-shadow preaches away by the yard, giving certainly, as I have no doubt was his practice in all business transactions, very ample measure. And then Wordsworth in *propria persona* begins to praise him, just as if he were not praising himself; or else he calls up the rector, or the rector's wife, or anybody else within reach, to talk after this fashion :—

I love to hear that eloquent old man  
 Pour forth his meditations, and descant  
 On human life, from infancy to age;  
 How pure his spirit; in what vivid lines  
 His mind gives back the various hues of things,  
 Caught in their fairest, happiest, attitudes.

There is to me something singularly inartistic in this round-about way of glorifying one's self; and though I am far from denying that Wordsworth, or the Pedlar, if you please, has been eloquent (rhetoric, indeed, abundantly, overbundantly poured upon us, is the great defect of the poem, as a poem); still I doubt if the natural effect of eloquence is here skilfully presented to the reader. The magnates of Hungary, when moved by the eloquent words, by the tears still more eloquent, of their injured Queen, did not remark to each other, 'How finely Her Majesty has spoken! how impressively she has wept!' No. Their swords flashed out from the scabbard all together, under the impulse, as it seemed, of a single will; and they shouted as one man, 'Moriamur pro rege nostro Maria Theresa.'

'The Prelude' is a great poem in every sense of the word. Of 'The Excursion' it would not be accurate to say as much. But it is full of smaller poems, many of them extremely beauti-

ful ; and even the less inspired portion, the reasonings and speculations, somehow linking together the separate idylls that give to the work its claim upon posterity, have their own merit and importance. Wordsworth may be heavy ; he may be prolix ; he may drop down from poetry to rhetoric ; from rhetoric to rather solemn prose, but he never writes mere rubbish. That is more than we can say of many poets—great poets too. Of Byron, for instance, not unfrequently ; and of Campbell, I might almost say, as a general rule.

'The Excursion,' after introducing us to its hero, opens with the well-known story of Margaret. The story, that is, of a woman deserted by her husband, not from wantonness, not from any failure of affection, but because, during a season of bitter distress, when many rich

Sank down, as in a dream, among the poor,  
And of the poor did many cease to be,  
And their place knew them not,

he had not courage enough, or faith enough, to watch the misery of those whom he loved. He therefore enlisted, without giving his wife any notice of his intention ; and, leaving his bounty money behind him, disappeared, as a wave disappears, into the great ocean of human life. The woman sought him day after day ; she wandered up and down like a troubled spirit, enquired of beggars and wayfarers if they had seen her husband.

This tale did Margaret tell with many tears :  
And, when she ended, I had little power  
To give her comfort, and was glad to take  
Such words of comfort from her mouth as served  
To cheer us both : . . .

And many days  
About the fields I wander, knowing this  
Only, that what I seek I cannot find ;  
And to myself, said she, have done much wrong,  
And to his helpless infant.

The story is told, from beginning to end, in Wordsworth's best manner. The high and tender Muses, to adopt his own carefully chosen expression, must have filled his mind whilst he was writing it, with one of their happiest and noblest inspirations. So much so, that zealous Wordsworthians, whilst they admit that 'The Excursion' may not be, throughout its whole length, a perfect poem, always maintain that, if the story of Margaret had been published by itself, it would have awakened, without any drawback at all, absolute and universal enthusiasm. It may be so. Indeed, I am quite willing to believe that it must have been so. This pathetic poem, however, has been criticised, and criticised in so provoking a manner as to leave us without any answer; though we cannot but feel, all the time, that it is a criticism buzzing and playing about upon the surface without reaching the heart of the matter. Men, say Margaret's enemies, do not enlist into the abyss of space; or even, as might be more natural, into the planet Mars, beyond the reach of post-office or mail cart. They enlist into the 33rd Foot, distinguished as the Duke of Wellington's regiment; or into the 50th, known to fame, so De Quincey tells us, as the Dirty Half Hundred. It would have been easy, the blasphemers add, to ascertain what particular regiments had sent recruiting parties into that particular district, at any given time. Hence, if Margaret, instead of wandering up and down, and confiding in the philosophical pedlar, who seems on this occasion to have been a most feckless and unprofitable counsellor, had gone to the rector of the parish, or better still, to the local attorney, either of these gentlemen would at once have written to the War Office, and received an answer back in two or three days, with 'On His Majesty's Service' written outside; which letter would have given a full account of the absconding Robert's whereabouts and future prospects. One hostile commentator even goes so far as to declare that Margaret, instead of being sympathised with and uplifted to the

stars in immortal poetry, should have been sent to gaol on the charge of murdering her infant child by systematic neglect. Nay, he is so far lost to decency as to add, that Wordsworth's incomparable Pedlar ought to have accompanied her there as an accessory before the fact. We feel, however, that this, after all, is but a piece of half-malicious fun. Whatever may be the bald, literal truth contained in this criticism, no man of sense would allow it to affect, in the smallest degree, his estimate of the poem. We grant Wordsworth his *πον οτόν* on this occasion, just as in Mr. Browning's 'Good News from Ghent,' we forbear to enquire how he applies his facts to a town obviously neither besieged nor blockaded. Just as in the magnificent storm scene of the 'Antiquary,' we close our eyes against the obtrusive suggestion that it is not usual, to say the least of it, for the sun to set over the sea on the east coast of Scotland. Margaret therefore remains, and will remain, a beautiful idyll—a poem not only admired but beloved, so long as the English language keeps its life, and we feel half inclined to refute her traducers after the manner of Dr. Johnson, when he refuted Bishop Berkeley; or to speak more seriously, we might observe that the fact of the enlistment is a mere arbitrary fact, and could be at once got rid of by substituting the navy or the merchant-navy, or some other form of concealment, for the supposed soldiership, that thus the objection would fall to the ground, and men would be left to appreciate the beauty of the tale in peace.

The next section of 'The Excursion' is also, I think, the most important one. It is here that the gems lie thickest—it is here that both Wordsworth's poetry and Wordsworth's philosophy are seen in their noblest proportions. Here, also, we find that the French Revolution has been at work upon his mind. His own thoughts and feelings, such as we remember them in 'The Prelude,' are again presented to us, under a thin disguise. And accordingly, the verse glows with a spirit

reflected from the passions of his youth—a spirit which I, at least, often find wanting in his more domestic and homely compositions.

The Pedlar's friend and fellow-countryman has retired, after leading a life of great excitement, to be happy with a wife whom he loves,

To a low cottage, in a sunny bay,  
Where the salt sea innocuously breaks,  
And the low breeze as innocently breathes,  
On Devon's leafy shores.

The loss, however, of this devoted wife, preceded, and, as far as man can judge, produced, by the untimely deaths of two lovely children, shatters the fabric of his happiness for ever. Hope is over for him now, and life, however long, must continue grey and without sunlight to the end. Grief, nevertheless—that is the active throbbing and stinging of grief, dies away—sorrow exhausts itself, in his case, as in that of all others ; and though the manner in which the memory of the dead is, or seems to be, forgotten sometimes jars upon the heart, if this were not so, the work of the world could hardly be carried on.

He fell at first, as men do, into a state of uncomplaining apathy—of restless indifference, letting the days slip by him as they would. From that abstraction he was roused, but how?

Even as a thoughtful shepherd, by a flash  
Of Lightning startled in a gloomy cave  
Of these wild Hills ; for lo ! the Dread Bastile,  
With all the chambers in its horrid towers,  
Fell to the ground—by violence overthrown.

And straightway from the arch  
A golden palace rose, or seemed to rise  
The appointed seat of equitable law—  
And mild Paternal sway.

Here we have the revolutionary Wordsworth over again ; Just as in the natural influences shaping the Pedlar's mind, we have a repetition of Wordsworth's youth as it appears in the two

books called ‘Childhood’ and ‘Schooltime.’ The Pedlar, moreover, as well as Wordsworth, is a poet, one sown by Nature indeed, and having taught himself, somehow, to engraft upon this original stock or root no small amount of prose, but still a poet. ‘The mountains and the mists,’ ‘the presences of Nature,’ and ‘the souls of lonely places,’ act upon these two, just as if the two were one. So also, when we come to the French Revolution, the Pedlar’s solitary friend introduces us to all those passions and sympathies with which Coleridge, at least, was familiar in Wordsworth then and long before. In these respects, as I have said, the men are not two but one. Hence ‘The Excursion’ owes much to the suppression of ‘The Prelude.’ And if the former poem had been given to the world in its due season, ‘The Excursion’ would hardly, I think, have appeared exactly in its present shape.

When, however, the Solitary has to surrender himself to another disappointment—to a second despair, and when the two despairs combine to form a pressure on the heart worse than any bitterness of death, we find ourselves in a new scene, and treading fresh ground. We know already how in a delirium of self-deceit he broke faith

with those, whom he had laid  
In earth’s dark chambers with a Christian’s Hope.

But on awakening from this dream, he found that recollections and feelings supposed to be dead were still strong enough to pierce and torture his spirit to its inmost depths. This discovery was made on shipboard, where escape from his returning anguish was impossible. He then describes his grief and remorse in a strain of poetry that makes us angry with the public and the critics of that time for listening so coldly :—

But oh ye powers  
Of soul and sense, mysteriously allied !  
Oh never let the wretched, if a choice  
Be left him, trust the freight of his despair

To a long voyage on the silent deep—  
For like a plague will memory break out,  
And, in the blank and solitude of things  
Upon his spirit, with a fever's strength,  
Will conscience prey. Feebly must they have felt  
Who in old times attired with whips and snakes  
The vengeful Furies. Beautiful regards  
Were turned on me. The face of one I loved—  
The wife, the mother—pitifully fixing  
Tender reproaches insupportable.

Disappointed, finally, both in Europe and America ; and having thus lost all faith in the perfectibility of man, he retires to a lonely recess among the mountains with shattered fortunes and with a broken heart. He has formed no plan, and looks forward to nothing better than dreaming away the remainder of his time in a sort of lethargy—half-scepticism and half-in-difference—believing nothing, hoping nothing, fearing nothing, and loving nothing. His fellow-countryman, however, and early friend, still trusts that the inborn energy of his active, intense, and glowing mind, originally derived from Nature, is only overlaid for a time, and has not been altogether extinguished among the ashes of that unhappy and ill-spent life. He, accordingly, invades the solitude, accompanied by Words-worth.

After much earnest discourse, lofty speculation, and profound argument, the infidel hermit is so far influenced by these reasonings as to accompany them, *multa reluctans*, on their holiday tour. And we are given to understand that the various aspects of humanity presented to him, one by one, do not fail of their intended effect.

It is believed by his friends that the every day life of man, with its lights and shadows, its sorrows and consolations, will not be thrown open to his inspection in vain. The cure, indeed, is imperfect, but a seed is sown, we are led to hope, that cannot wither—a fire kindled within that must burn on till the needful purification is accomplished.

The plot of the poem, as far as there is plot, is thus before you. And though, as I shall point out by and by, there are many fine passages, indeed many separate poems, beautiful in themselves, embedded in the latter half of 'The Excursion,' the finest continuous poetry occurs just whilst the outline of the plot is coming into shape—just whilst our Solitary is struggling against the benign influences put forth on his behalf by these wise and true-hearted friends. As soon as this obstinate resistance is overcome, and they pass onward together, the interest of the dialogue slackens, and the narrative becomes weaker and less poetical ; we then join company with a model Rector, known both to Wordsworth and the Pedlar. There comes in also the Rector's Wife, though of this particular lady little is said.

The introduction of the worthy ecclesiastic does not add to the spirit of the poem. The second, third, and fourth books are still those to which we most frequently turn. It is in them that, for the most part, we find those magnificent descriptions of scenery, intuitions, as it were, into the heart of Nature herself —such as, whether found here or elsewhere, place Wordsworth, in one quality of a poet—I mean as the interpreter between God as the Creator of the world and less inspired men—above all his rivals and contemporaries. I content myself with only mentioning the unsurpassed description of the collapsing storm in the second book, that you may refer to it if you will. The biography, I think I may so call it, of the mountain heights which overhang the secluded home occupied by the Solitary is, I doubt not, also familiar to you, but I wish to quote it, as showing with what exquisite grace and subtlety, both of feeling and language, Wordsworth sets forth the analogies, existing in Nature, between the separate senses, at any rate as far as man is concerned.

Many are the notes  
Which, in his tuneful course, the wind draws forth  
From rocks, woods, caverns, heaths, and dashing shores :  
And well those lofty brethren bear their part

In the wild concert chiefly when the storm  
Rides high ; then all the upper air they fill  
With roaring sound that ceases not to flow,  
Like smoke, along the level of the blast,  
In mighty current ; theirs, too, is the song  
Of stream and headlong flood that seldom fails ;  
And, in the grim and breathless hour of noon,  
Methinks that I have heard them echo back  
The thunder's greeting :—nor have Nature's laws  
Left them ungifted with a power to yield  
Music of finer tone; a harmony,  
So do I call it, though it be the hand  
Of silence, though there be no voice ;—the clouds,  
The mist, the shadows, light of golden suns,  
Motions of moonlight, all come thither—touch,  
And have an answer—thither come, and shape  
A language not unwelcome to sick hearts  
And idle spirits.

There is, I think, a picture of the same kind, seen by the same inner eye, or rather, seen and heard together, by the same poet-instinct, which is ear and eye at once, in a smaller poem, more beautiful still. It is where the poet, buried deep in a woodland recess, discerns that the evening breeze has entered the glade ; because, although the oak trees remain unmoved, the more sensitive ash feels the touch and ripple of that voiceless wind, and makes, in obedience thereto,

A soft eye-music of slow-waving boughs.

These exquisite descriptive passages, however, were not, according to all probability, in Wordsworth's own opinion, and are not, I apprehend, in the opinion of his disciples, the most valuable portions of his work. Great poets, I believe, and small ones also perhaps, in their degree, are to be found in two very different kinds of men. The Bard, or born singer of the tribe, whose stormy verses record the battles of his countrymen, whose love ditties give renown to their bright-haired maids—whose mournful numbers attest the grief and loyalty of the clan, when some great chief passes away into the land of

shadows. He is one figure : quite another one is the natural lawgiver, prophet, and sage, whose strains are of a graver mood, and flow forth under an inspiration more austere. To this latter class, to the brotherhood of Orpheus or Empedocles, rather than that of Homer and Pindar, Wordsworth belongs.

It is, I say, in the treatment of these Orphean topics that there become visible those elements of original genius, on which his worshippers rely, when they claim for him the poetical primacy of his time.

I might read page after page imbued with a lofty spirit of reverence towards God and humble faith in the inherent immortality and unfathomable destinies of man ; but it is perhaps better that you should read them for yourselves, and find them out for yourselves. Now, one of the most indispensable qualities for a student or critic of poetry is to make himself sensible of the special merits of what he is studying, to try and sympathise with the character of the writings and of the writer, and thus to bring himself, as far as may be, within the sphere of the poet's influence and dominion. I hope that I have taught myself to do this in some degree ; and whilst I confess my own native preference for poetry with more blood and pulsation in it, I yet feel for Wordsworth much of the admiration and reverence that is his due ; that is, indeed, owing to him, as a sacred debt, by those of my generation. Nor am I prepared to say, if anyone condemn this preference of mine, as somewhat illiberal and shallow, that he is altogether wrong. It is not Wordsworth's fault that I am unable to breathe 'the difficult air of the iced mountain top' as easily as others. The fact undoubtedly is, that whether Wordsworth's meditations might have been congenial to me or not; my imagination in boyhood and in youth was so entirely pre-occupied by Byron and Scott, that Wordsworth was never able to dislodge them from their vantage ground. I need not inform you that the masters and disciples

of the two schools of poetry are not always on the best terms with one another. Byron characterises the work we are now discussing as

A drowsy, frowsy poem called 'The Excursion,'  
Writ in a manner that is my aversion.

The brilliant author of 'Nightshade Abbey,' on the other hand, ridicules Byron as the great Mr. Cypress, with the happiest humour; and in another novel bestows upon us, glancing I presume at Scott, what he calls the epitome and essence of all the war songs and epics that ever were written. These verses are so witty, that although they have not much to do with our present subject, I hope you will allow me to indulge myself by reading them to you.

The mountain sheep are sweeter,  
But the valley sheep are fatter,  
We therefore deemed it meeter  
To carry off the latter.  
We made an expedition,  
We met a host and quelled it,  
We stormed a strong position,  
And killed the men who held it.  
Ednyfed, King of Dyfed,  
His head was borne before us,  
His wine and beasts supply our feasts,  
And his overthrow our chorus.

To return, however, to our immediate theme. One of the most interesting portions of 'The Excursion' (and here, surely, not even Byron could complain of Wordsworth as heavy or tedious) is where the spiritual instincts of mankind developing themselves according to nationalities, climates, and diverging traditions, are rapidly and brilliantly sketched; the central solitude of the heavenly abyss is occupied, of course, by

Jehovah, shapeless power above all powers,  
Single and one, the Omnipresent God  
By local utterance, or blaze of light,  
Or cloud of darkness localised in heaven.

On earth enshrined within the wandering ark,  
Or out of Zion thundering from His throne  
Between the cherubim.

After the Hebrew, the Persian is brought before us who—

Zealous to reject  
Altar and image, the inclusive walls,  
And roofs of temples built by human hands ;  
To loftiest heights ascending, from their tops  
Presented sacrifice to moon and stars,  
And to the winds and mother elements,  
And the whole circle of the heavens, for Him  
A sensitive existence, and a God.

Afterwards, the more sensual Babylonian comes before us,  
uprearing in honour of Belus, with toil immense,

Tower eight times planted on the top of tower.

Then we see how the Chaldean shepherds were taught to watch the stars floating in ether above the boundless Eastern plains, until they passed beyond these natural observations into a region where the imaginative faculty becomes lord ; and so believed that the constellations overhead carried along with them in their courses the inevitable future, and were charged with solemn messages from the gods to man. Finally, it is pointed out to us that whatever outward shape this faith may have assumed, even in Greece, the abode of a livelier, lighter, and a less earnest people, it rested everywhere upon deep foundations of truth, so that doubtless in all countries alike

A thought arose  
Of life continuous, being unimpaired,  
That hath been, is, and where it is shall be ;  
Yea ! shall endure, existence unexposed  
To the blind walk of mortal accident ;  
From diminution safe and weakening age,  
Whilst man grows old, and dwindles, and decays,  
And countless generations of mankind  
Depart, and leave no vestige where they trod.

The end of this fourth book becomes tedious, and the later

books of the poem more tedious still. They are, no doubt, deserving of high esteem and respectful admiration, as embodying noble ideas of morality, and a noble system of religion, in excellent English. But the interminable harangues of the Pedlar and the Rector have this one fatal fault, that they are interminable. Their extreme diffuseness, moreover, and sonorous amplifications, belong, I think, less to poetry than to rhetoric ; and rhetoric, however weighty in point of thought, however elevated in point of style, is an alloy that should be admitted very sparingly into the golden mintage of the poet's mind. To me, again, the living biography of 'The Prelude,' with its intense presentations of the revolutionary fever in France, and the effect of that contagious fever upon Wordsworth himself, is much more interesting than this reproduction of the same state of things by the phantom Pedlar and his Scotch friend. In spite of much splendid poetry in the earlier half, it is hardly to be wondered at that 'The Excursion' has never been a great favourite with the general public ; nor do I think it ever will be; not but that even in the last five books, those who look for them may find beautiful idylls seated in the midst of those moral and philosophical dissertations that abound.

I would particularly direct your attention to the Rector's sketch of a parishioner, deaf and dumb from his birth. This poem—for a separate poem it is—appears to me most exquisitely written and full of tender pathos ; a pathos not confined to the individual case, but diffusing far and wide what Wordsworth elsewhere calls

The still, sad music of humanity.

He grew up  
From year to year, in loneliness of soul,  
And this deep mountain valley was to him  
Soundless with all its streams. The bird of dawn  
Did never rouse this cottager from sleep  
With startling summons ; not for his delight  
Murmured the labouring bee. When stormy winds  
Were working the broad bosom of the lake

Into a thousand, thousand sparkling waves,  
Rocking the trees, and driving cloud on cloud  
Along the sharp edge of yon lofty crag ;  
The agitated scene before his eye  
Was silent as a picture—evermore  
Were all things silent—whereso'er he moved.

And so on. At length the slow disease insensibly consumed the powers of nature, and a few short steps of friends and kindred bore him from his home

To the profounder stillness of the grave,  
And yon tall pine tree, whose composing sound  
Was wasted on the good man's living ear,  
Hath now its own peculiar sanctity,  
And at the touch of every wandering breeze  
Murmurs, not idly, o'er his peaceful grave.

To all human things, however—even to Harley Street, as poor Sydney Smith gasped out in his dying moments—an end must come sooner or later. ‘The Excursion’ ends, as I have said, with an intimation that some degree of healing and renovation had been brought to the wounded spirit of the Solitary by a communion with purer and healthier souls. And future excursions are projected, so as to complete the cure, and restore him entirely to self-respect and peace. Whether this was accomplished or not—whether he afterwards suffered any relapse, does not appear. The other excursions, if they ever took place, have never been communicated to the world, and now, I should think, never will be.

Before passing away from ‘The Excursion,’ it may not be amiss to remind you that when Wordsworth began his career, he attacked with great vehemence what he called ‘poetic diction.’ To a diction for poetry, as distinguished from prose diction, he denied any real existence. I shall return to consider this point in a moment. In the meantime, it is to be observed, that as far as ‘The Excursion’ is concerned, he quietly drops his theory without any notice to his readers—without, I suppose, any distinct consciousness on his own part.

Much of the diction indeed—and for this I find no fault with him, seeing that the topics treated of, and the manner of their treatment, render such a style expedient—is more than in most poets elaborate and stately. Sometimes, indeed, so over stately, that we are tempted to smile, and to wonder how Wordsworth would have reconciled such phraseology with his earlier ukase on the subject. For instance, the Pedlar's friend—a Scotch parson—became chaplain to a Highland regiment—that is the way how men state such a fact in prose. This, on the other hand, is the manner in which the antagonist of poetic diction thinks fit to tell us of it in verse:—

Filled with vague hopes, he undertook the task  
Of military chaplain to a troop  
Cheered by the Highland bag-pipe ; as they marched,  
In plaided vest, his fellow-countrymen.

Putting aside, however, such passages as mere slips, we may add that in many of his later poems, such as ‘Dion,’ ‘Lao-damia’ and the like, his style is just as much, or rather just as little, like prose as the style of any other poet. In truth, it does not appear to me that he had considered this matter deeply enough to arrive at any very exact conclusion. There is a logical opposition between prose and verse (we have been taught that much by the ‘Bourgeois Gentilhomme’); they are opposed, as the two outward forms of expression—the two separate methods of using language, so as to communicate thought; but between prose and poetry, there is no such necessary opposition. Many sentences formally prose are full of the purest poetry, and a memoria technica is just as really verse as the ‘Iliad.’ It is true, no doubt, that the inevitable rhythm and flow (such as the passions and emotions out of which poetry grows tend to generate) has been systematically cultivated, and gradually matured into regular systems of versification. Verse, accordingly, by common consent, is now recognised as the natural body—the fit fleshly tabernacle, if I may so speak—appropriated

to the spirit of song ; but the voice of poetry, whether heard through the medium of verse or not, is a special voice. It is not necessarily less simple or more ornate than the unimpassioned talk or writing of ordinary men ; but, nevertheless, it remains, and always will remain apart, and instinct with a life and fire of its own.

Let us take as an example six lines of Cowper. Some people might call them plain, if not rather coarse ; but every jot of them is poetical diction in the true sense of the word. They are no more prose than the finest parts of ‘ Paradise Lost.’

The lines in question form part of an angry, though loving remonstrance to England in her then state, as Cowper thought it, of degradation and decay :—

Whilst yet thou wast a grovelling, puding chit,  
Thy bones unfashioned, and thy joints unknit,  
The Roman taught thy stubborn knee to bow,  
Though twice a Cæsar could not bend thee now.  
For thou wert nursed amid the din of arms,  
And sucked a breast that panted with alarms.

What Wordsworth meant to condemn, no doubt, was the sham feeling, the conventional whine then in vogue, repeating and imitating, without passion, forms of language that only poetic passion can justify ; and in that respect he certainly did good service. The souls of poets may be likened to trees in the Spring, with the thrill of life upon them from root to leader. They break forth spontaneously into leaves and blossoms, into colour, and light, and fragrance ; but it is because they are in harmony with the breath of heaven, with the sunshine, and the rain. There is nothing meretricious about these flowers—nothing false—nothing out of keeping with Nature and truth ; but still they are, and must be, chestnut blooms, or lilacs, or roses—not faggots and walking sticks. What Wordsworth really protested against was a habit men had fallen into, during a temporary eclipse and winter of poetical feeling. They went

about hanging artificial flowers upon sapless and leafless branches, and then pretended that they were just as good as real gardens and orchards. Wordsworth's censure of that kind of diction, whether it occur in verse or in prose, is sound. His practical instincts guided him rightly, and his example is of the highest value. Still, I do not think in the discussion which he raised, he saw his way clearly enough to be regarded as an infallible critic—a judge without appeal.

From all that has gone before, you will probably infer that I do not look upon 'The Excursion' as one great work. It combines together mechanically, but not vitally, various poems unequally beautiful. The connecting disquisitions, admirable from many points of view, do not possess, in my opinion, high poetical merit. But is this, after all, of much importance? The notion that no one can be a great poet who is not also a long poet, is perhaps one of those *idola fori*—those illusions of the market-place and stock exchange, justly condemned by Bacon. We do not know that Pindar ever passed beyond 500 lines. 'Sappho, the Tenth Muse,' as they called her; Archilochus, the only man fitted in the judgment of Greece to rank with Homer; were both writers of what we should now call fugitive pieces; Archilochus, it might be said, I believe, particularly; but I did not intend the pun. When we come to the fugitive pieces of Wordsworth, they have wings to soar; but, happily, no feet to run away with. 'The Ode on Immortality,' called for shortness by many the 'Platonic Ode,' is remarkable on many accounts, particularly on this account, that it extorts often, from the most bigoted anti-Wordsworthians, a reluctant and growling admiration. They cannot understand how so sublime an effort of imagination can have proceeded from such a writer; but so it is. The inmost fibres of the human soul respond to it—the dreams and visions that come to all men, have come also to Wordsworth, only in his case they are clothed in diviner presences, and touched with a glow of diviner light. Again,

under a lyrical inspiration of a different kind, in his own line he moves alone—

Within that circle none can walk but he.

‘She was a Phantom of Delight,’ ‘Three years she grew in Sun and Shower,’ ‘Lucy Gray,’ and a score of other masterpieces, could have been written by no one but Wordsworth. Their characteristic merit is a union of grace, tenderness, and depth, that we look for in vain elsewhere. I pay this tribute to them readily, nay, eagerly. Because their beauty, however exquisite, strikes me always as being a little cold ; I like—perhaps it is a boyish, if not a vulgar taste—more effervescence, more fire. Some of Campbell’s verses, some also of Scott’s, keep ringing in my ears, even whilst I admit that the songs just named by me may demand a higher and rarer inspiration.

We now come to the Sonnets. In this branch of his art Wordsworth has no rival but Shakspere ; and I would not confidently affirm that even he stands higher. Our great dramatist is too monotonous, and, in spite of the wonderful strength and sweetness of his style, leaves a sense of pain and oppression behind him ; whilst Wordsworth is fresh and healthful as to-day’s buoyant south-west breeze, after the hateful easterly winds that have gnawed at us for months. Our author’s Sonnets, moreover, require a separate notice from me, if only upon this account. I mean that one objection I took to Wordsworth in a former lecture—namely, that for a poet who claims, or has claimed for him, so very exalted a rank, he is but an indifferent melodist—does not apply to them. Of the grave and solemn harmony suited for that kind of composition he is, undoubtedly, a perfect master. All things considered, indeed, those who are happily able to believe that no one can be a great poet who is not also a good man—who think as Robert Grant, unless I mistake not, once poetised :

That all the dread sublimities of song,  
These, Virtue, these, to thee alone belong—

may well assert that of the mighty epoch during which he lived he was the leading spirit. But in order to settle that question, we must endeavour, as Samuel Johnson once advised Boswell emphatically, to clear our minds of cant. We may say, I apprehend, truly enough, that there have been poets possessed by their genius in much the same sense as men of old, according to the Jewish belief, were possessed by the Devil ; and that genius, in such cases, is not a blessing but a curse. In estimating degrees of intellectual power, however, it is scarcely relevant to talk about moral excellence. Eustacius, in Scott's novel of 'The Abbot,' sensibly remarks about Mary's enemies, whom her partisans were disparaging before the battle—'They are evil men, no doubt; but the trade of war demands no saints : Kirkcaldy of Grange was long ago pronounced by the constable de Montmorency to be the first soldier in Europe.' As in war so in poetry. If Belial—fiend though he be—sings better and more powerfully than Israfel the angel, it is our business, as critics, to say so without hesitation.

There are, moreover, several writers, not Belials, of whom I should like to say a word. Scott, the poet of the young, as it is now the fashion to call him, not without a covert sneer ; I, on the contrary, look upon it as a high compliment. For whom is poetry meant, I should like to know, if not for the young ? Are Jared and Methusaleh the typical judges and critics whom we should seek to please ? There is also Campbell—that most anomalous of singers, who seems every now then to be swept off his legs by some mighty rushing wind of inspiration, and lifted up, *nolens volens*, into the high places of poetry ; but who, when that wind drops, does not only become weak and as other men, but absolutely a great deal weaker. No gentleman of fair abilities and decent education could have written things that Campbell gave unhesitatingly to the world, without positive discredit. But I have not time to speak of Scott or Campbell to-day ; for, after all, the rival with whom Words-

worth had to reckon, was neither of them, but Byron standing alone.

Many of the young may wonder that I make no mention of Shelley or of Keats. The fact is, that neither of these two poets interfered with, or helped to overshadow, Wordsworth at all. The premature death of Keats, indeed, was perhaps the greatest blow of its kind, the severest blighting of her poetical bloom, that England ever sustained ; but till after he had passed away the world at large knew nothing about him.

In order that I may prove to you how Shelley also was unknown and unregarded, I am tempted—and for this I hope you will pardon me—to embark upon a digression.

Some three and forty years ago, I brought forward a motion in the Oxford Union that Shelley was a greater poet than Byron. The debate, after the ordinary fashion of non-political debates, would probably have been a languid one ; but friends of mine at Cambridge (the motion, I may say, was an echo of Cambridge thought and feeling) took the matter up, and appeared suddenly on the scene of action. The first of these friends was Arthur Hallam, the Marcellus of our time. Of him I need not speak, I need not tell you how, as combining perfect sweetness of nature with most extraordinary intellectual gifts, he left upon the minds of all who knew him an impression never to be effaced. I need not do this, I say, for has not his *monumentum ære perennius* been raised in all men's sight by another and a nobler hand ?

The second was also a very remarkable man—Mr. Sunderland. By common consent he was an orator unequalled in promise, and at that moment rapidly expanding into unequalled power. His fate, alas ! was even more appalling than that of Arthur Hallam. Just as he was issuing forth into life, all the stormy hopes—all the struggling energies—all the tumultuous aspirations of his impassioned soul were suddenly arrested by the grasp of some mysterious brain disease. For forty years he

remained dumb, torpid, and motionless, recalling to our minds that mighty image, suggesting itself to the poet among the glaciers of Switzerland, of

A cataract  
Frozen in an instant.

The third member of the trio happily survives—Lord Houghton—known to all men alike for his brilliant talents and for the sympathetic tenderness of his nature; for the helping hand eagerly stretched out to raise up and guide any struggling wayfarer of literature who happens to falter or faint upon the road. The first two found no difficulty in obtaining permission to come here. But Lord Houghton, though at least as great an enthusiast for Shelley as either of the other two, was unluckily at the moment, as I was told, a *gated* enthusiast. In order to fulfil his mission he had to escape from the iron vigilance of Trinity, triumphant but breathless, without an exeat, and also without a hat. However, here he was; here they were; and the benches of the Union, instead of being scantily dotted with indifferent occupants, swarmed and murmured like a hive of bees. Lord Houghton, some of you may perhaps remember, has described the discussion that ensued. So also has His Grace, or rather His Eminence, the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster. But the recollections, both of the one and of the other, are hazy and incorrect. Lord Houghton, for instance, has picturesquely introduced Mr. Gladstone, who really had very little to do with the business, except that he came afterwards to supper—a feat that might have been accomplished with equal success by a man of much inferior genius. The Cardinal fancies that Hallam and Milnes spoke before Sunderland, who then, according to him, came in like Jupiter Tonans, and electrified his hearers. This was not so. Sunderland, a politician and not a man of letters, imagined, perhaps, that Arthur Hallam's greater knowledge of the subject and profounder philosophical faculty might take the wind out of his sails.

At any rate, he spoke first, and spoke with great effect, though scarcely, I believe, with the same fire that he often put forth on more congenial subjects. Then followed Hallam, with equal, if not superior force. After him jumped up a gentleman from Oriel, who, in a bluff and burly manner, began to pooh-pooh the pretensions of Shelley, as to which, I need hardly say, he was absolutely ignorant; when, all at once, he caught sight of Mr. Richard Milnes, now Lord Houghton, sitting in his place. He caught sight of him, as of one still competent to speak in answer—still competent to make a pounce, and tear him limb from limb. The two former orators, then, were the mere *velites*, the skirmishers of the expedition, the foraging parties, in advance of the real army; whilst Lord Houghton represented in his own person the *triarii* of the tenth legion, the Macedonian phalanx, the Old Guard of Napoleon, irresistible in attack and inexorable to resistance. In the presence of that terrible antagonist the gentleman from Oriel lost heart and faltered. He changed his front at once, and went over to the enemy like the Saxons at Leipsic, in the very middle of the action, recording, as a deserter, his vote for Shelley, to the amazement and amusement of his hearers. Lord Houghton then stood up, and showed consummate skill as an advocate. In order to prove Shelley's gradual approximation out of his boyish atheism to the principles of Christian truth, he read, with great taste and feeling, that fine chorus from the 'Hellas,' one of Shelley's latest works, the chorus I mean opening thus—

A power from the unknown God,  
A Promethean conqueror came;  
Like a triumphal path, he trod  
The thorns of death and shame.

Anxious, however, perhaps over-anxious, to inculcate, or as somebody once phrased it, to tread the truth into the ignorant and unthinking multitude before him, he passed somewhat lightly over the fact that the chorus in question is a dramatic

chorus, and put by the poet into the mouths of captive Christian women. After him there was silence in the Union for several minutes, and then Mr. Manning, of Balliol, perhaps at that particular time the actual leader of our debates, with great propriety rose. He felt that it would be a somewhat clownish and inhospitable proceeding, if these bold guests went away unchallenged—if their shields were not touched with the arms of courtesy, by some daring Oxford cavalier. He spoke well, exceedingly well, but the framework of his argument—the backbone of his oration—amounted just to this: Byron is a great poet, we have all of us read Byron; but (and this is my justification for introducing the topic at all) if Shelley had been a great poet, we should have read him also; but we none of us have done so. Therefore Shelley is not a great poet—*a fortiori* he is not so great a poet as Byron. In *hanc sententiam*, an immense majority of the Union went *pedibus*: the debate was over, and we all of us, including Mr. Gladstone, adjourned, as I have said, to supper.

Returning from this digression to the point where I left off, I may say that the era, looked at as a poetical era, to which both Byron and Wordsworth belonged, was one of unusual—I may say of almost unparalleled, splendour. Byron, Scott, Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Keats, Campbell, Moore, the ninth among them, whichever he may be, is still a considerable name. Nay, besides these, there are many others, such as Leigh Hunt, Barry Cornwall, and Landor, who ought not to be, and are not likely to be, soon forgotten. The headship of this mighty clan of poets is, as far as I can judge, now assigned by professed English critics to Wordsworth. By the English public, by foreign critics, by the world at large from St. Petersburg to Cape Horn—if anybody reads poetry at Cape Horn—it is awarded, I am sure, to Byron. It is true that the volcanic genius of Byron, working on in its inexhaustible affluence, poured forth, intermingled with higher products, smoke, and sulphur, and

mud, and scoriæ, but it remained also to the last a fountain of living fire. Poems like ‘Don Juan’ or ‘The Vision of Judgment’ may be open to criticism on many grounds ; still, in point of power, passion, and effect, they are marvellous productions. And though his more serious poetry may not always be as original and unforced, it has, nevertheless, a life and vigour about it that purer and more conscientious poets might often envy. After all, why should we not admire both Byron and Wordsworth, without measuring their respective heights to an inch? Why not remember Goethe’s speech, when a question arose as to whether he or Schiller were the greater man? ‘You should thank your stars that you have got two such fellows as he and I, instead of wasting time in so frivolous a discussion.’ I will conclude with a passage from our author, conceived much in the same spirit—a passage written to show that all true poets, whatever their degree, should receive a just and generous recognition.

Yet is it just,  
 That here, in memory of all books that lay  
 Their sure foundations in the heart of man,  
 Whether by native prose or numerous verse,  
 That, in the name of all inspirèd souls,  
 From Homer, the great thunderer, from the voice  
 That roars along the bed of Jewish song,  
 And that, more varied and elaborate,  
 Those trumpet-tones of Harmony, that shake  
 Our shores in England ; from those loftiest notes,  
 Down to the low and wren-like warblings, made  
 For cottagers and spinners at the wheel,  
 And sunburnt travellers resting their tired limbs.  
 ’Tis just that in behalf of these, the works,  
 And of the men that made them, whether known,  
 Or sleeping nameless in their scattered graves,  
 That I should here assert their rights, attest  
 Their honours ; and should, once for all, pronounce  
 Their benediction—speak of them as powers  
 For ever to be hallowed ; only less  
 For what we are, and what we may become,  
 Than Nature’s self, which is the breath of God,  
 Or His pure word by miracle revealed.

## LECTURE IV.

## WALTER SCOTT.

CONTEMPORARY popularity is like bloom upon fruit, while yet attached to the tree. Though afterwards its substantial qualities may still be there ; nay, though in some cases they may even be matured and developed ; all that freshness and splendour, derived from the sap and spirit of life, cannot but imperceptibly fade away, to return no more. Just so everything that is transitory (and there is often much that is transitory in the reputation of celebrated authors) must be allowed to evaporate and disappear before their real station in literature can be finally determined. For this reason, among other reasons, it is desirable that great writers—great writings rather, for it comes after all to that—should be weighed and sifted at certain intervals, with a view to their more accurate revaluation. I say at certain intervals, because I am by no means clear that the revised estimate, sure to be made as soon as the fashion of an author's day has become a little obsolete, is the one which will be, or ought to be, accepted in the end by mankind.

The generation that immediately follows a great writer is tired of hearing him called Aristides the Just by predecessors, for whose literary judgment they often entertain, I am sorry to say, no great reverence.

They see, and see truly, that interests purely personal—interests that grow up out of the man's special character—out of the accidental circumstances of his career, his political con-

nections, his brilliant social qualities ; perhaps, even out of his dazzling faults—account for some, if not for much, of the glory that he has won.

They soon, therefore, come to think that this favourite of their fathers has been over-praised. They lose their tempers on the subject, and rush into the contrary extreme, under-rating him as much as he has been over-rated of old. It is not until these prepossessions and antagonisms die off; until everything that does not spring, as it were, out of the root of the matter, has been weeded away, that a satisfactory decision is attainable. Then, and not till then, is the verdict of time, never to be disturbed again, engrossed and registered for all generations.

All this is true of Scott ; true, perhaps, to an extent more than common. Nevertheless, it affects me but little on the present occasion. If I came forward as a profound judge, or subtilising critic, to estimate his pretensions, you might fairly, from the point of view natural to youth, address me thus :—‘ You are too old ; your notions have been superseded ; your mind is warped by prejudices, from which we, happily, have freed ourselves. For us, the genius you insist upon our admiring is like salt that has lost its savour ; so that we toss his works aside on behalf of poets and novelists of our own.’ Out of such difficulties I escape, when I frankly confess that I appear before you to-day as an advocate—an advocate and a partisan. By doing this, I think I act in harmony with the principles laid down by me on the delivery of my opening lecture. I said then, as I say now, that any man competent to decide, with unfaltering impartiality, under the guidance of that intellectual light called by Bacon ‘ dry light,’ upon all the varieties and modifications of genius—to weigh them one against the other, and then to organise with exact skill proper tables of precedence—must be a second Aristotle. But Aristotles are not so easy to find. It is surely better to be less ambitious, to confess to yourself and to others that your judgment *must* be tinged by passion and

prejudice—*must* have steeped itself, once for all, in the enthusiasms of a vanished youth. It is of course quite right ; nay, whether right or not, it is inevitable, that influences of the sort should vary from generation to generation, perhaps almost from year to year, exactly as new modes of thought, new phases of feeling, new manifestations of human nature, new yearnings after the infinite and unknown, are created by the changing circumstances and necessities of the time. Even then, however, it is well to remind those for whom the immediate future is reserved, that their youth is not the only youth that has flourished, their enthusiasm not the only enthusiasm that has thrown its light upon life ; and that the fashions of their day, like other fashions, are destined to lose their gloss of novelty, and to wax old like a garment. However this may be, I repeat that I come forward to-day as an advocate, and not as a judge. It was during my childhood that Scott rose to the height of his renown ; and I make it my business to hold up, through good report and evil report, the poetical banner under which I enlisted as a boy. I knew the battle in ‘Marmion’ by heart almost before I could read, and I cannot raze out—I do not wish to raze out—of my soul, all that filled and coloured it in days gone by. When I point out to you, therefore, why and how I admire this great poet, let it be understood that my criticisms are partial ; partial in every sense of the word ; that it belongs perhaps as much to the animal spirits and the circulation of the blood, as to any intellectual faculties, if the unflagging energy of Scott’s narrative power, and the unaffected vigour of his epic style, have still charms for me, such as subtler, and profounder, and more delicate compositions do not possess ; if to sackbut, and shawm, and dulcimer, and psaltery, and all manner of musical instruments, I yet prefer, as I do prefer, the sound of the trumpet. Now as surely as Milton is lord of the organ, with all its mighty utterances and solemn modulations, so surely,

among English singers, is Scott the undoubted inheritor of that trumpet note, which, under the breath of Homer, has made the wrath of Achilles immortal.

It is true that with regard to Walter Scott, considered merely as a verse-poet, there is room for much difference of opinion. I, his advocate, should say that he was essentially a poet sown by Nature ; that he sprang up like a forest tree from the heart of the soil—a forest tree, on whose behalf it may be said that little defects of symmetry or smoothness are amply redeemed by a massive grandeur of stem, and an undying strength of vegetation. I do not expect the same kind of beauty in a towering oak as in a rosebush or a rhododendron ; but other people, who do hope to find in such an oak what it does not and cannot possess, who look out for flowers and fruit, for medicinal gums, and precious spices, will undoubtedly be disappointed. Being so disappointed, they may turn away with indifference, or even speak of the tree with contempt, as but a commonplace piece of timber after all. Taking Scott, however, as not merely a writer of verse, but as a great power in literature, as one standing before the world for many years, who poured forth the flood of his genius from inexhaustible reservoirs of imagination, wit, sense, humour, and inventive power, all of them ready to his hand, I cannot but wonder at the tone in which I hear him spoken of sometimes. One reason of this I suspect to be, that his depreciation, having but little time to spare from contemporary poets and novelists, just glance at him grudgingly, and justify their neglect by criticising his works before they have read them. In the meantime, however, it is well to bear in mind that Scott, together with Byron, stands in one respect apart from and above all rivalry.

Our nineteenth century, here in England, has many names to be proud of. Shelley recalls to us the fabled bird of paradise—a bird with wings strong enough to soar for ever, but

footless, and therefore incapable of touching earth. In spite of, or perhaps in some degree because of, this incapacity, he floats through the lights of heaven 'like an unbodied joy,' and bathes himself in the golden haze 'that gathers above the sunken sun,' but it is for English eyes alone that he has done so.

Wordsworth, again, proves how deeply he felt, how profoundly he sympathised with, both God's nature and man's nature. We at home discern that it was open to him to have become one of the greatest among moral philosophers, if he had not preferred to bid for immortality as a poet ; but Europe knows him not. The gifts of Coleridge, again, were various and exquisite ; and, alas for that irreparable loss ! the unparalleled promise of Keats, nipped in the bud, has left behind it a sorrowful yearning, and a sense of deprivation within us that nothing can fill up.

Still there is this fact, not to be set aside or escaped from. Two voices, and two voices only, in that glorious age of English literature, have made their way beyond our island barriers, to the ear and the heart of the world. The voice of Byron, I mean, and the voice of Scott. Of Byron it is not now necessary to speak ; but whatever may be said of him, Scott, at any rate, owed this distinction to no personal qualities or casual events, but to his literary power alone. Now this is a distinction easily perhaps overvalued. We cannot, however, treat it as one of small importance. I should not of course accept the opinion of Frenchmen, Italians, Germans, or the like, with reference to the comparative merits of two English poets, as an opinion that ought to override our verdict at home. But still, from one point of view, the judgment of contemporary foreigners has a relationship to the judgment of our own posterity not to be overlooked. The eyes of both are removed, though in different ways, to a certain distance, and therefore the mere blossoms of a style in fashion for the moment, produce but little effect upon them. That which belongs, not to one gener-

ation or to one country, but to time and the world—that which rests upon foundations that are broad and deep, engages and fixes their attention. Hence, if through some unexpected coincidence, some accidental similarity of grouping, or unforeseen repetition, as it were, of history and the local circumstances of life, there is found a kinship between the new lays and those ancient lays that exercise dominion, not over this people or that people, but over all the children of men, the result is inevitable. We cannot wonder if foreign countries should, I may say, anticipate posterity, and the hearts of all, far and near, incline themselves to such a revival of song. They incline to it because it seems to touch upon chords beloved already, and to speak with the voice of an old familiar friend. Now after the immortal ballads of Homer, there are no ballad poems so full of the spirit of Homer as these of Scott. In his hands, the noble instrument that had hardly uttered a sound since poetry was young becomes again a thing of life.

X

This was not because Scott imitated Homer—because he was influenced by the reading of Homer—because he hoped to rival Homer; but simply because they both echoed the feelings of, and derived their inspiration from, two states of society, widely separated indeed by time, but not otherwise unlike. Mediæval Scotland (the observation is not mine), with its septs and clans, looking up as they did in unquenchable loyalty to their hereditary chieftains (sons of Zeus, as it were, in their eyes, like the primitive sovereigns of Hellas), had much in common with the armed confederation that gathered itself together in front of Troy.

The bold pirate of the *Ægean* seas may strike the imagination more than the Borderers harrying Northumberland when their stock of beef ran low, or the Highland onset that smote some Saxon village like an earthquake, to leave it

A mass of ashes slak'd with blood—

but the point of honour was the same in both—the hope of

profit was the same—the impulses that urged them on—the life they led, the distinctions they coveted, were the same in kind ; in both countries also the traditions of the clan—the great deeds of those gone before—the mighty names that starred their unwritten history, were entrusted to bards or rhapsodists, who lent an additional charm by their recitations to the solemn festivals of the tribe. The Seer, revealing his visions of hope or dread, supplies the place of the Delphic priestess, or the oracular voice at Dodona with its mysterious words of encouragement and warning. Out of the one set of influences rose up Homer, out of the other rose up Scott. They were nourished upon similar intellectual food, open to similar imaginative impressions, and therefore they are poets, however different in rank, belonging pretty much to the same order. The Nile, to which Homer has been often compared, may roll over vaster spaces a more imposing volume of waters than the Tweed ; but, at any rate, they are equally rivers, derived from natural forces, and obedient to natural laws identical for both.

Aliquando bonus dormitat Homerus.

To such occasional somnolence Scott, I am afraid, is more prone even than his illustrious predecessor.

The fact is, I apprehend, that Scott, like all writers of a true and living ballad—like all genuine narrative poets, possessed an instinctive confidence in his power to interest the audience before him ; he troubles himself but little therefore in polishing bad lines, or in accumulating exquisite poetical phrases to fill up the interstices of his tale. His great object is to get on, to avoid delay, the mother of dulness. His metaphors are short cuts to his readers' understanding, and his poetry, when it shines—shines as the armour of a knight ready for battle under the morning sun ; not like the purple robes or cloth of gold that encumber men at a lamp-lighted festival. To this desire of his not to waste time he sacrifices, I daresay, a good deal ; but he thought, or rather perhaps he felt, that although he

might improve particular passages and write generally in a more finished style, he should run the risk of chilling and stiffening the march of his story as it moved along. Hence it seems as if his occasional slovenliness, his frequent slovenliness if you will, of metre and diction was accepted by him deliberately, and was not the result of a want of power to write otherwise. This may be inferred, I think, first, from the ease and grace with which he manages (if he chooses to undertake them) metres more difficult and complicated than his favourite octo-syllabic ; and secondly, from the sure-footed certainty with which he becomes a poet, and a great poet, whenever any adequate occasion summons up his genius to cope with it. The Arab horse in Job went often, I daresay, languidly enough in his slow paces ; but the breath of the approaching battle never failed to clothe his neck with thunder; so is it at all times with Scott.

Overleaping, however, the gulf of three thousand years, and looking at Scott no longer as the legitimate heir of Homer, but as a modern English poet, we may pronounce that a certain portion of his early career was fortunate for himself, and still more fortunate for the world. One of the most usual characteristics of genius—particularly of genius as it comes out of the chrysalis, to struggle upwards unevenly on half-developed wings—is the instinctive tendency to separate itself from ordinary companionship. Its delight is in its own thoughts, in secret dreams, and fanciful pre-occupations that rise up from within, overshadowing the common daylight, and shutting out the ordinary interests of the street and the market-place. Now the mischief to a young man of such reserve—of such visionary seclusion within the recesses of his own mind, is this—that although, for a time, it may seem to foster and animate some special gift, it tends afterwards to impair the temper, and dull the edge of the very genius that it has helped to create.

A mathematician like Newton, indeed, who deals with ab-

stractions—and nothing but abstractions—may perhaps remain, at whatever cost to himself, still without much loss to mankind, a mere intellectual engine ; he may spin his original thoughts and discoveries out of his own bowels, and link them together from within, as the spider spins and fastens her web. But the principal subject-matter with which a poet has to deal is the life of man ; and he who shrinks from that life, and dwells apart, in however gorgeous a cloud-land of his own, is *pro tanto* weakened and maimed in his capacity to excel ; still more, perhaps, in his capacity to influence others. Now if ever there was a youth of simple masculine tastes and straightforward energy of character, Scott was that youth. So much so, that if to him unbroken health and the natural activity of boyhood had been granted from his first years, we may well believe, from all we know of him, that he would have thrown himself body and soul into some career of action. He must always have been a leader of men, but it probably would have been

O'er grim Busaco's iron ridge,

or on the deck of a seventy-four—not from Paternoster Row, or Constable's bookshop in Edinburgh, that his leadership would have been made manifest. As it happened, however, early lameness and serious ill health—spitting of blood, the repeated breaking of blood vessels—ill-health, in short, threatening to end in premature death, afflicted his childhood. Thus, while the foundations of his mind were being laid, against his will, against his very nature, he fell exactly into conditions such as genius of a more effeminate type selects, and cherishes and clings to. He was thrown upon solitary fancies and solitary reading. He had to commune with his own soul, and to find a relaxation, denied to him through ordinary channels, in the indulgence of impassioned feelings, and in the silent and sequestered play of a creative imagination. These things did their work for him ; they brought all that they bring to those who think that the author, in proportion to his merit and suc-

cess, is entitled to usurp upon the qualities of the man. Scott, however, was of a different opinion : The moment his strength returned, the moment the world was open to him again, he ceased to dream, he ceased to care for solitude, and what Cowper somewhere calls ‘the pleasure of poetic pains ;’ his natural pursuits were eagerly resumed, and all his natural forces, put aside till then, reappeared at once in full operation. Hence, he united the keen interest of youth in all that life can promise or give—in all the raw materials, we perhaps may say, of Poetry and Art ; with those tendencies habitual to genius, which, if yielded to overmuch, are apt to defeat, more or less, the very purposes they ought to serve. The hackneyed line of Terence—

Homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto—

a line well worthy of being meditated upon by many who devote themselves to literature, became the rule of his conduct, and his guide to the sources of a genuine inspiration. In such a progress he added to his fine talents and quick sensibilities a robust good sense, a breadth of view, and a masculine simplicity of mind, not always to be found in the *genus irritabile vatum*.

From these causes also, combined, no doubt, with a native generosity of temper, he was a much better acceptor and admirer of what his contemporaries produced than some other distinguished men of the time. Whether it was to encourage the young, to attract notice to the humble and obscure, or to support and animate some half-desponding veteran of literature, he was always ready with his cheerful approbation, with his advice, with his assistance, and, when necessary, with his purse. He did not insult Wordsworth and Coleridge, like Byron, or splenetically under-value Byron, like Wordsworth and Coleridge ; far from it ; whatever was good of its kind he recognised instinctively and at once. Whether it came from Johnson or Crabbe, from the Ettrick Shepherd or Wilson, from Miss Edgeworth or Miss Austen, his generous sympathy was alive

and eager to meet it ; nay, more : in the midst of his own incessant labours, under the oppression of exhausting toil and constant anxiety, he could always find time to bestow upon lesser men, who had done well in their degree, some word of honest praise, or some useful suggestion. One great indiscretion, no doubt, he committed—an indiscretion that recalls his own dictum, ‘how the most sensible men often crowd the whole amount of folly, that is due from them as average human beings, into a single action, whilst by men of smaller capacity it is distributed over a long series of details, in a long series of years.’ One astonishing error, I repeat, precipitated him, when at the height of his prosperity, into sudden ruin, and darkened all the closing years of his life—I mean, of course, that he entangled himself in commercial speculations with the Ballantynes. But we may yet say of this disaster, now that the sorrow is past and gone, Without that fatal mistake we never should have known the iron strength of his resolution or the inveterate nobleness of his temper. If he had gone to his grave, from those restless and glittering scenes of anxious enjoyment through which he was passing when the blow fell, we should have loved and admired his memory, no doubt ; but we should never have regarded the prosperous author with as deep and warm an interest as we do regard the hero and martyr ; as we regard him, who in the hour of trial, refused to accept all doubtful facilities—all offers of a questionable compromise—who sacrificed ease and health and comfort, nay, who sacrificed life itself, in order that he might walk straight along the path of duty, and uphold his honour to the end, without a stain.

It cannot be necessary to recall to you at any great length the first steps of Walter Scott’s literary career. He began, we all know, as a painstaking author, who worked on in obscurity, rather than as a great original genius. He edited ‘Dryden,’ he edited ‘Swift,’ he presided over the Annual Register of Edinburgh. Besides all this taskwork, however, he collected, as a

labour of love, and began to publish in 1802 the ‘Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border.’ This last undertaking, though it might be looked upon as one that belongs at least as much to an archæologist or historian as to a poet, prepared his way, nevertheless, for more serious poetical efforts at a future time. During these years of preparation he also gave to the world his first original poems—that is to say, several powerful ballads, well known now, ‘Glenfinlas,’ ‘The Eve of St. John,’ ‘The Gray Brother,’ ‘Cadyow Castle,’ and others. These early productions, received as they were, must have encouraged him to hope for success in more important literary ventures. But besides the actual verses then written, the studies and researches into which he was drawn filled his imagination with the spirit of all those ancient traditions that cling to the soil. Each breath of song, each yet unextinguished superstition, all the unsforgotton legends of faithful love, of rugged fidelity, or of wild revenge, floated into his mind. There, in that congenial home, concentrated, perhaps, and consolidated by the pressure of ordinary life, they lay hid to shape and crystallise themselves by degrees, even as the unembodied vapours of the diamond ripen slowly to gems in the silence of their native mine.

Moreover, we must not forget that Scott practised at the Bar for some years, with a fair prospect of success; and throughout life made, as he said himself, literature his crutch, and not his staff. In so strong a man, it was, I think, very advantageous that such should be the case. Weaker natures may be distracted and broken by the conflicting claims of duty and inclination. They may neglect their business, and yet neglect it in vain, going languidly and remorsefully to their self-chosen labours, because they are haunted by a shadow of the duties that for their sake they have put aside. Scott, however, always tried to do whatever was to be done as well as possible. He prided himself on being an efficient clerk of session, an influential sheriff, a barrister who knew the law, a country gentleman

fully competent to understand and perform the duties of his station. And to no man would he have been less obliged than to one who sought, in deference to his literary powers, to carry him across those ordinary difficulties in the path, over which he chose to stride on his own legs. In this manner, without looking behind him, or hesitating, or wasting time on fruitless regrets, he obeyed the Roman precept, '*Hoc age* ;' or as the Scripture phrases it, 'Whatever thou hast to do, do it with all thy might.' This being so, he was enabled to leap back into literature with a strong rebound, as it were, and a living elasticity, all the greater in proportion to the pressure exercised against himself and his own fancies. We may well imagine therefore, if his ambition had not been turned into another channel by his solitary dreams whilst a young invalid, that he would have chosen to devote himself to the Bar, instead of to authorship, and sought to distinguish himself as a public man. It is an interesting question to think over, whether, in such case, he would ever have achieved a first-rate success.

My own belief is that the orator and the poet, if they are *finitimi* at all, as Cicero, or let us say frankly, as the Latin Grammar has it, are so very near of kin that the relationship is within the prohibited degrees. Hence, except in the case of some special and almost infallible dispensation, they are never united. The poet touches a string, and leaves it to vibrate in the minds of his hearers. In proportion as the touch is delicate and slight, and yet the consequent vibrations numerous, lasting, and intense, exactly in that proportion is his power shown. But the orator who tried to do this, would ruin himself at once. The occasions are rare indeed when he can lean upon the sympathising emotions of his audience so confidently as to feel that the slightest hint will at once be caught up—the most evanescent allusions universally accepted and understood. The power of driving home by one blow after another, his opinions, his arguments, his passions—the power of capturing by successive

assaults, all the detached redoubts and outworks of the place, and from thence bringing up his artillery to crush the main defences of some strong fortress that he has undertaken to storm —these are his methods of war, this is the strength on which he relies.

I am far from denying that Cicero may be thus far right. The ultimate elements of both arts are much the same. Imagination, passion, power of sympathy, power of language, are needed by the poet and the orator alike—only by the determination, either of some accident, or perhaps of some original difference in the foundations of the character, these apparently identical qualities form a different chemical combination. It may well be that a great orator could turn himself into a poet, and a great poet into an orator, by study, thought, and practice. But even then, not so as to possess both faculties in full perfection at once. I believe that just as the bard's rhetoric became more effective, so would his ethereal spirit of poetry thicken and grow coarse ; just as the orator's verses lifted themselves into real song, would the impact of his spoken eloquence strike more feebly and drop to the ground, a *telum imbelli sine ictu*.

Enough, however, of this. Whether Scott would have succeeded at the Bar, or in Parliament, if he had addicted himself to pursuits other than literary, has long been an idle speculation. 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel' took the public favour by storm, and left him hardly any choice but to proceed in a career so brilliantly and prosperously begun. This success, great as it was, might well have been anticipated by any judicious reader of the ballads referred to above. There is also a magnificent fragment given us, I believe, for the first time, by Lockhart in his well-known 'Life and Memoirs of Scott.' A poem unfinished, indeed, but quite as noble, both in conception and execution, as any part of 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel.' In all these compositions it is noticeable, with how fine a spiritual electricity Scott's imagination responds to those unseen

influences, which steal across the mysterious something, sun-derving, as the Laureate tells us, ghosts and demons from 'shadow-casting men.' In 'Glenfinlas,' for instance, we cannot but feel with what consummate skill, or, as I should prefer to say, with how sure an instinct, with how noble an unconsciousness, the grief-stricken prophet Moy, forlorn of hope and happiness, is prepared for an intercourse with phantoms.

Whether, according to the views of the poet, the conditions of mind under which Moy is suffering create such phantoms for the mind itself from within, or whether, by exposing the nerves naked and bare to some supernatural touch that cannot take effect upon ordinary men, his soul becomes vulnerable to them from without, we know not, and do not care to know. Anyhow, the gloomy spirit of prophecy settles upon him like a cloud. Before he lets his brave and joyous companion, accompanied by his favourite hounds, depart on his doubtful errand, the seer is already overmastered and chilled by an ominous foresight. Hence, from the moment Ronald leaves him, that plague, well known to many (the waiting I mean under circumstances of reasonable or unreasonable alarm, in impotent anxiety, whilst the pressure of increasing terror fastens itself upon the nerves and the will) kept paralysing his animal spirits, and choking his natural courage, more and more. How much, then, must these shuddering apprehensions have grown upon him, when those (as none knew better than Scott) patterns of ideal fidelity, the dogs, who would have watched over their prostrate master, without food or sleep, through the fiery tumult of a battle-field, or fought away wolves and vultures from his corpse at the solitary mountain tarn, forgot their duty, deserted their beloved lord in the face of some unknown and inconceivable danger, and slunk home in an agony of selfish fear, just as if they had been men? Nor was this all. The harp naturally, I suppose, inanimate, seems to have drawn into itself, through communication with the soul

of man, an element of sensitive and sympathetic life, and trembles half-consciously, beneath the influence of that nameless terror :—

Within an hour return'd each hound ;  
In rush'd the rousers of the deer ;  
They howl'd in melancholy sound,  
Then closely couch'd beside the Seer.

Sudden the hounds erect their ears,  
And sudden cease their moaning howl ;  
Close press'd to Moy, they mark their fears  
By shivering limbs and stifled growl.

Untouch'd, the harp began to ring,  
As softly, slowly, oped the door ;  
And shook responsive every string,  
As a light footfall press'd the floor.

And by the watch-fire's glimmering light,  
Close by the minstrel's side was seen  
An huntress maid, in beauty bright,  
All dripping wet her robes of green.

All dripping wet her garments seem,  
Chilled was her cheek, her bosom bare,  
As, bending o'er the dying gleam,  
She wrung the moisture from her hair.

It was a summer night, and as yet there is no mention of rain or tempest. This is true ; but then, her mother was the lady of the flood—that mischievous drowning fairy whom all men dread—this one trace, accordingly, of her unearthly parentage she was unable to hide. There seems to be some recognised law of magic, as here in the dripping garments of this unreal woman, as in the cloven hoof of the legendary Satan and the like, from which demon creatures making themselves visible on earth cannot escape. There must, I mean, be something still retained as a mark of separation—something to warn the unwary mortal whom they address.

However completely such indications might be thrown away upon a youth like Ronald, self-deceived through his passions, they were not likely to cheat the eyes of the gifted chief-

tain, sundered by thought and grief from his kind—of the doomed foreteller, to whom

Full many a charm and spell was known,  
Which wandering spirits shriek to hear,  
And many a lay of potent tone,  
That is not meant for mortal ear.

Upon him, therefore, the studied allurements of the seeming huntress were wasted, although

With maiden blush she softly said,  
'O gentle huntsman, hast thou seen,  
In deep Glenfinlas' moonlight glade,  
A lovely maid in vest of green?'

We need not dwell on the final stanzas, nor on the dreadful fate of the chieftain, who returns no more ; but we may well accept this whole legend, as interpreting, by the voice of a true poet, the spirit which broods over the mist-covered fells of Scotland, and moulds from his cradle the spirit of the Celtic mountaineer.

The superstition, however, upon which the next ballad—‘The Eve of St. John’—rests, is deeper and more universal, and, as a natural consequence, less dependent upon local influences. It arises for the poet now, as it always has arisen, and will, I believe, always continue to arise, out of instincts unquenchable in the heart of man. I am speaking, as doubtless you know already, of a belief in the return, or, if you will, in the final appearance, half-earthly, half-spiritual, of the dead or dying, under the strong urgency of passionate affection. These aspects show themselves at a distance from the scene of death, to those upon whom they desire to fix a last lingering look, or else to impress a last ineffaceable presence. They do this just as they have passed, or are in the act of passing, to a life beyond. This is a form of apparition, capable of being used effectively even now, whenever the hand of a master bends itself to the task. It is effective for this reason : events of such a nature are vouched

for so often, and on authority seemingly so unexceptionable, as not unfrequently to stagger every-day scepticism ; so that each fresh instance (and they are poured upon us continually) meets with no stronger contradiction than a shake of the head, and a semi-articulate protest. How this operates it is easy to conceive. Take 'Macbeth' for instance. The popular belief in witchcraft gave to the witchcraft portions of the play a deep and living interest—an interest such as we are obliged to build up for ourselves by a laborious exercise of the historical imagination. Now, though for us witchcraft no longer exists, this later superstition retains substance enough to animate a poem with real colour and warmth. In Shakspere's time, I daresay there were many sensible men, who gave as little credit to witches then as we give to ghosts now ; but still they were not far enough away beyond the belief to escape altogether from the last lingering touches of that old superstition. Witches were seen everywhere—not only in remote villages, blighting cattle and terrifying neighbours by the help of the Devil ; but also in Courts of Assize, holding up their hands when called upon, without any assistance from that perfidious ally. Nay, by taking a little trouble, you might get burned as a witch or a wizard yourself. Here was reality with a vengeance—reality which it was dangerous, if not difficult, to impugn. Accordingly, in dealing with such subjects, the poet, whether credulous or incredulous himself, worked in harmony with the spirit of his time, and was inspired by a reflected, if not by an actual faith. So now most educated people would explain the legends floating about society, as to mysterious appearances of the loved and lost, before they were known to be lost, by referring them to states of nervous excitement, or to accidental coincidences. They would, at any rate, insist upon the undoubted fact that those only among these visions, upon which the seal of confirmation is afterwards set, are remembered and recorded, whilst other similar fancies, not being so confirmed, drop into oblivion

and trouble us no more. Still, when all is said that can be said, there remains a tremulous inclination to listen, at least, to such stories, and of this tremulous inclination Scott has made use with such force and spirit as to sweep away all criticism and doubt before it.

My lady, each night, sought the lonely light  
That burns on the wild Watchfold ;  
For, from height to height, the beacons bright  
Of the English foemen told.

The bittern clamour'd from the moss,  
The wind blew loud and shrill ;  
Yet the craggy pathway she did cross  
To the airy Beacon Hill.

The second night I kept her in sight  
Till to the fire she came,  
And, by Mary's might ! an Armed Knight  
Stood by the lonely flame.

'At the lone midnight hour, when bad spirits have power,  
In thy chamber will I be.'—  
With that he was gone, and my lady left alone,  
And no more did I see.

There is, no doubt, some slight difference between this legend and the ordinary form of such legends, but still it is the same in essence, still it recognises the power of love, as the one power capable of bridging over the gulf that separates life from death, and explains for us, by the help of the poet, how things undreamt of in our philosophy may yet be possible, though we do not accept them as true. The phantom of the knight, who has just been murdered by a jealous husband, feels, even beyond the grave, that silent evocation emanating from his mistress's passionate will and intense desire—will and desire that go forth unconsciously into the place of souls, seeking, and finding, and drawing back to her side the loved one wherever he may be. Accordingly, he is there standing at the usual trysting-

place, together with the unfaithful wife. He is not, however, unseen, a page watches them, and listens to their talk as related above.

After this the Eve of Saint John arrives, a deep stupor falls upon the Baron, and the terrified lady sees, as she thinks, her lover drawing near in ignorance of her husband's return. She is, however, soon undeceived. The phantom unfolds all that is necessary for her to learn, and the Poem ends with the following impressive stanzas :—

‘At our trysting place, for a certain space,  
I must wander to and fro ;  
But I had not had power to come to thy bower  
Hadst thou not conjured me so.’—

Love master'd fear—her brow she cross'd ;  
‘How, Richard, hast thou sped ?  
And art thou saved, or art thou lost ?’  
The vision shook his head !

‘Who spilleth life, shall forfeit life ;  
So bid thy lord believe :  
That lawless love is guilt above,  
This awful sign receive.’

He laid his left palm on an oaken beam ;  
His right upon her hand ;  
The lady shrank, and fainting sank,  
For it scorch'd like a fiery brand.

The sable score of fingers four  
Remains on that beam impress'd ;  
And for evermore that lady wore  
A band about her wrist.

There is a nun in Dryburgh bower,  
Ne'er looks upon the sun ;  
There is a monk in Melrose tower,  
He speaketh word to none.

‘Cadyow Castle’ is very spirited and powerful ; but it belongs to a different kind of poetry altogether, being a ballad drawn from real history. Except in point of the colouring, which is

certainly true to nature, and probably not untrue, even as to the minuter facts of the case, it differs little from the orthodox prose account : Accordingly the supernatural is not touched upon at all. We have to deal with the embittered hearts of men and the furious passions (we have seen them at work in our own day, though happily not in our own country) which arise out of defeat and broken hope, and a baffled spirit in civil war.<sup>1</sup> From this point of view, the savage joy of the murderer, as he looks back upon his successful crime, is pourtrayed with Scott's usual force. His vigorous conception, indeed, of the whole scene will continue to produce upon those readers (a somewhat oppressed and down-trodden class) who value in verse picturesque vividness and just thinking above what is called profound thinking—who value simple and striking poetry above elaborate philosophical rhetoric, the full effect intended by its author.

From the wild Border's humbled side,  
In haughty triumph marched he,  
Whilst Knox relaxed his bigot pride,  
And smiled the traitorous pomp to see.

But can stern Power, with all his vaunt,  
Or Pomp, with all her courtly glare,  
The settled heart of vengeance daunt,  
Or change the purpose of despair?

Dark Morton, girt with many a spear,  
Murder's foul minion, led the van ;  
And clashed their broadswords in the rear  
The wild Macfarlane's plaided clan.

'Mid pennoned spears, a steely grove,  
Proud Murray's plumage floated high ;  
Scarce could his trampling charger move,  
So close the minions crowded nigh.

All these precautions are idle against the adventurer who carries his life in his hand, ready to die if need be, but sternly determined not to swerve from his long-meditated purpose by

<sup>1</sup> I refer of course to the assassination of President Lincoln.

so much as a hair's breadth. All these signs of power therefore, all these semblances of protection around the destined victim, serve only to embroider, as it were, the murderer's triumph, and to enhance his gloomy exultation.

The last of Scott's ballads which I shall notice here is not, I think, included in the common editions of his works. The superstition on which it rests, though not the same as that referred to in 'The Eve of Saint John,' is hardly less universal. It is based upon the magical efficacy of words spoken, either under the influence of intense and bitter passion ; or, at any rate, in harmony with strange and solemn conjunctures, beyond the reach of our human will, or human knowledge. It takes various forms, as for instance, the form of unwilling or unconscious prophecy. I need not remind you of the well-known Scriptural question, 'Art thou King of the Jews?' taken together with the Divine answer, 'Thou hast said it.' In other words, our Saviour declares, 'The question comes from you in mockery ; but a power that you wot not of has overmastered your words and filled them—though intended only to convey a momentary sneer, with a truth immortally the same through all the ages to come.' There is, however, another form of the same mysterious instinct—and with this we are more immediately concerned. It is exemplified in that well-known proverb, 'Curses, like chickens, come home to roost.' This proverb originally implied, I suppose, that a temper in human beings overpassing the permitted limits of human frailty, and trespassing upon qualities belonging, in their nature, to the spirit of absolute evil, lays men open, as creatures abandoning God, to an evil influence immediately. It marks them off as belonging to the class under a demoniacal power, and bestows upon them the blessings of the wicked genii, which, as the Eastern apothegm tells us, are curses in disguise. Upon this tradition —this superstition, if you will—the noble ballad I am referring to depends for its interest. He who suffers therein from the

malice of the fiend, unconsciously evoked, is one of those Puritan enthusiasts of the seventeenth century, hunted down for his opinions by Claverhouse and the Tories. The moral lesson to be derived from his fate is perhaps this :—That he who surrenders himself to unchristian rancour and a ferocious desire of revenge, cannot escape from the consequences that wait upon these passions, even when they hide themselves under the mask of religion. A mysterious personage tempts the fugitive into a gloomy cavern by the hope of revenge and the promise of empire, but his courage fails him, and he is cast forth again to die.

The brand he forsook, and the horn he took  
 To say a gentle sound ;  
 But so wild a blast, from the bugle brast,  
 That the cavern rocked around.

With clank, and clang, that cavern rang ;  
 The steeds did stamp and neigh ;  
 And loud was the yell, as each warrior fell  
 Starts up with whoop and cry.

‘ Woe, woe,’ they cried, ‘ thou caitiff coward,  
 That ever thou wert born—  
 Why drew ye not the knightly sword,  
 Before ye blew the horn ? ’

The finest stanzas, however, are those which contain the description of the slumbering army, waiting to be roused by the appointed master of the spell.

He led him through an iron door,  
 And up a winding stair ;  
 And in wild amaze did the wanderer gaze  
 On the sight which opened there.

Through the gloomy night flashed ruddy light,  
 A thousand torches glow.  
 The cave rose high, like a vaulted sky,  
 O'er stalls in double row.

In every stall of that endless hall  
 Stood a steed in barbing bright.  
 At the foot of each steed, all arm'd save the head,  
 Lay stretch'd a stalwart knight.

In each mailed hand was a naked brand ;  
As they lay on the black bull's hide,  
Each visage stern did upwards turn,  
With eyeballs fixed and wide.

The casque hung near each cavalier ;  
The plumes waved mournfully  
At every tread, which the wanderer made,  
Through the Hall of Gramarye.

And onward seen in lustre sheen  
Still lengthening to the sight,  
Through the endless hall, stood steeds in stall,  
And by each lay a sable knight.

Still as the dead lay each horseman dread,  
And moved nor limb nor tongue ;  
Each steed stood stiff as an earth-fast cliff,  
Nor hoof nor bridle rung.

We have thus far accompanied this great man to the period of his life when he first descended into that arena where he reigned so long, and won so many triumphs. With what tropical rapidity he flooded everything around him in light, cannot be unknown to anyone here ; nor can you be ignorant either of all that followed ; how the winds beat and the storm arose—how the darkness of misfortune encompassed him round, to drown all that early radiance in melancholy vapours, and cloud the setting of his day. There is something, I have always fancied, of that unconscious impulse towards prophecy spoken of just above, in a famous chapter of his ‘Antiquary.’ I mean where he describes at length a stormy sunset—a stormy sunset after a brilliant morning—after a brilliant, though harassed and struggling afternoon. He seems to rehearse in that chapter his own career—to paint his own future fortunes, and inevitable fate. It is true that he compares the dying sun before him to a monarch and not to a poet ; but in that metaphor, seemingly foreign to himself, we feel that he is uttering, after the manner of such blind predictions, a veiled but indisputable truth. It is certain, no doubt, that he never wielded a common

sceptre, that he never wore a mere golden crown ; but he lived and died, nevertheless, a born king of men. I hope you will pardon me if I read the passage over to you.

The Sun was now resting his huge disk upon the edge of the level ocean, and gilded the accumulation of huge clouds through which he had travelled the livelong day, and which now assembled on all sides, like misfortunes and disasters around a sinking empire, or a falling monarch. Still, however, his dying splendour gave a sombre magnificence to the massive congregation of vapours, forming, out of their unsubstantial gloom, the show of pyramids and towers, some touched with gold, some with purple, some with a hue of deep and dark red.

The disk of the Sun became almost totally obscured, ere he had altogether sunk below the horizon, and an early and livid shade of darkness belted the serene twilight of a summer evening. The wind began next to rise, but its wild and moaning sound was heard for some time, and its effects became visible on the bosom of the sea, before the gale was felt on shore. The mass of waters, now dark and threatening, began to lift itself in larger ridges, and sink in deeper furrows, forming waves that rose high in foam among the breakers, and burst upon the beach with a sound resembling distant thunder.

It was thus, like the sunset here made his own, whilst he still fought hard to the last against such ominous signs—against such ever-increasing gloom—that Walter Scott, to borrow Sir Philip Sidney's noble image derived also from the sun, 'still showing at intervals his greatest countenance in his lowest estate,' went to his rest.

## LECTURE V.

WALTER SCOTT—CONTINUED.

To begin at once where I left off when we parted a month ago.

‘The Lay of the Last Minstrel’ was Walter Scott’s first step out of the debateable land of literary amateurship, into those regions which he was soon to claim as his own—into the high places of poetry, into wide-spread popularity, and still-enduring renown. Remarkable, however, as the success of this work may have been, it is scarcely entitled, I think, to rank as a whole with ‘Marmion.’ Though it is not without some reluctance, that Scott’s sworn admirers are driven to accept this conclusion. For such is the freshness and grace, such the half-unconscious originality, of ‘The Lay of the Last Minstrel,’ that it always retains, even for those who cannot help setting other poems above it, a separate and peculiar charm.

We picture to ourselves that Scott, whilst writing it, must have felt a power within him growing day by day, a power like the wind, blowing at will, and sending ships before it exultingly into port. This kindling of the spirit, half animal and half intellectual, seems to be like wine in his veins, making itself perceptible in the ring of the verse, the careless grace of the composition, and the unbroken swiftness of the narrative. Moreover, in spite of this seeming carelessness and real ease,

greater pains were taken with the diction and versification, by Scott, in this poem, than he ever condescended to take afterwards. In 'Marmion,' and 'The Lady of the Lake,' he was advancing, as he well knew, to an assured victory. Here the battle was still doubtful; and therefore, like his own Lockesley in 'Ivanhoe' (who shot, as you will remember, heedlessly enough, when he had nothing to fear, but took care that his bowstring was flawless and his arrows truly feathered on critical occasions), Scott, in 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel,' left comparatively little to chance. Even here, however, quite early indeed in our companionship with him, a captious reader might find something to cavil at; for instance, I do not quite understand the Poet's method of reasoning in these well-known lines:—

His wither'd cheeks and tresses grey  
Seem'd to have known a better day.

Withered cheeks and tresses grey prove nothing, so far as I know, about former fortunes, but if I were forced to conclude from them, whether I would or no, I should rather infer that the minstrel had been having a hard time of it, than a better day. I may add, however, that I do not bring up such little mistakes, if they are mistakes, as a charge against Scott in particular.

It is astonishing what bad verses good, ay even great, poets can write, without losing or endangering their reputation. The mass of mankind, for whom, after all, poetry is written, measure a man by the sweep and reach of his spring-tides, and trouble themselves but little about his low-water mark. Take Campbell for instance; he has left us perhaps a dozen immortal odes, he has left us also a certain number of moderate compositions, whilst as for the remainder of his work, a large remainder, it would be gross flattery to call that even moderate. But who, in his estimate of Campbell, attends to anything except what is excellent? Indeed, not to waste time upon lesser lights, 'Ali-

quando bonus dormitat Homerus' has passed into a proverb, and of Shakspere himself, we know that

He wanted or forgot  
The greatest art of all, the art to blot.

In point of fact, it is hard to name any considerable verse-writer who is not full of faults, although the faults may not be quite as obvious, or quite so much on the surface, as those of Scott. Of our English poets, now in esteem, the only one, I believe, who does not write poorly now and then, is the Laureate ; and even with regard to him, I have heard it doubted, whether, if he had surrendered himself more freely and spontaneously to the impulse of his genius, although his plumage might have been somewhat less sleek and perfect, he would not have soared higher upon a stronger wing.

To return, however, to the author more immediately before us, it is necessary to recur to the formal poetical style of the eighteenth century, in order fully to appreciate Scott's original power, and to understand how his popularity swept over the barren flats of an exhausted literary tradition, like the spate of one of his own Highland rivers. His metrical romances at once took possession of the public heart, in England as well as in Scotland, and the Whig reviewers of Edinburgh, startled in the midst of an old literary supremacy by this unexpected Tory success, murmured with impotent dissatisfaction in vain.

It would indeed be most unjust to deny the high merit of Cowper, a poet who may be put out of fashion for a moment, but who never can be extinguished ; still his sphere is somewhat narrow in comparison ; he was rather a solitary prophet, profoundly impressed by a few noble thoughts and aspirations, than a writer, dealing with the various emotions—with the wide circle of human life.

I must also admit that there were other poems loftier and of rarer beauty, it may be, than those of Scott, already open to the world—already, I was going to say, published—but, except

in a technical and trading sense, published they were not. I am far from denying that Wordsworth's actual position—a position reached by slow degrees, is in the main well deserved ; still I plead guilty to a prejudice, a vulgar prejudice perhaps, in favour of a poem that instantly publishes itself ; and if this universal and eager acceptance of Scott's border epics became, after a time, somewhat less universal, and less eager, we must recollect that, by their very popularity, they gave an impulse to other writers—to Byron, to Moore, to a host of inferior imitators, who rose up between Scott and the eye of the public, like after-growths, surrounding and partly masking the original forest tree. When I spoke of poems which, however excellent, failed to obtain a hearing at once, I was not, of course, alluding to Byron, his works published themselves fast enough in all conscience. He may be even thought to have surpassed Scott in his own line ; Scott appears to have thought so himself. And yet, if we turn to Byron's Oriental tales, and take the best of them (shall we say 'The Siege of Corinth'?) for the purpose of measuring it with 'Marmion,' I think, upon the whole, that 'Marmion' has the advantage. No doubt, when you pass on to 'Manfred,' to the Third and Fourth Cantos of 'Childe Harold,' and to the better parts of 'Don Juan,' Scott has little to set against these masterpieces of his friend and rival. But it was not in 'Manfred' or 'Don Juan,' it was in those Oriental tales, that Byron's popularity culminated—it was by their help that he *bet* Scott, to use Scott's own homely expression, in poetry. Now whether the victory was achieved afterwards or not, To common eyes it was, up to that moment still uncertain, and but for 'Waverley' and his companions, Scott might still have fought on, as far as I can see, with no unreasonable hope of ultimate triumph. He was destined, however, to tread a somewhat different path, and to reap his principal harvest on another field ; of that hereafter. To return now to our text. It is a great point in literary art to begin well; the necessity of doing so has passed into a formal proverb :—

Dimidium facti, qui bene coepit, habet.

Now, the grace and pathos of Scott's Introduction to 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel' at once predisposes every reader in his favour even now. To his contemporaries, in addition to this, it bore the stamp of genuine original power. As far as we are concerned, the very currency of the coin, and the many spurious imitations struck from it, have somewhat dimmed its splendour, and impaired its character in that respect; still, though Scott, like his own aged harper, may have known a better day, that venerable and picturesque figure can never cease to interest us:—

The way was long, the wind was cold,  
The Minstrel was infirm and old ;  
  
The last of all the Bards was he,  
Who sung of Border chivalry ;  
For, welladay ! their date was fled,  
His tuneful brethren all were dead ;  
And he, neglected and oppress'd  
Wish'd to be with them, and at rest.  
No more on prancing palfrey borne,  
He caroll'd light as lark at morn ;  
No longer courted and caress'd,  
High placed in hall, a welcome guest,  
He pour'd, to lord and lady gay,  
The unpremeditated lay :  
Old times were changed, old manners gone ;  
A stranger fill'd the Stuarts' throne ;  
The bigots of the iron time  
Had call'd his harmless art a crime.  
A wandering Harper, scorn'd and poor,  
He begg'd his bread from door to door,  
And tuned, to please a peasant's ear,  
The harp a king had loved to hear.

The concluding lines of this celebrated Introduction are remarkable, not only in themselves, but also because they awakened an unforeseen and un hoped-for sympathy in the wearied soul of Pitt. This great statesman has often been reproached with his

indifference to literature. His friends might perhaps reply that the Pilot, in the act of weathering the storm, has but little time to waste upon such distractions. The *Memmi clara propago* is too intensely occupied with love for his country—

Talibus in rebus communi deesse saluti.

Nevertheless, even whilst his accumulated anxieties were slowly wearing him down into his grave, even as he was looking upon the gathering strength of the tempest, and closing, with a broken heart, after one of Napoleon's annihilating victories, the map of Europe for twenty years ;—even then, we are told, he was stolen away for a moment into Fairy land—stolen away from care and disease and swiftly advancing death, whilst he repeated to himself, in charmed surprise, the lines at the end—the lines, I mean, describing the aged harper's embarrassment, in the presence of those noble ladies, whom he had entreated, perhaps rashly entreated, to listen to his song. ‘This sort of feeling,’ said the great master of language (whom his enemies ironically complimented as the man able to deliver a king’s speech offhand) ‘I never could conceive as possible to be expressed in words,’ and he quoted, with the delight of a schoolboy, the famous passage :—

Perchance he wish’d his boon denied :  
For, when to tune his harp he tried,  
His trembling hand had lost the ease  
Which marks security to please ;  
And scenes, long past, of joy and pain  
Came wildering o’er his aged brain—  
He tried to tune his harp in vain !  
The pitying Duchess praised its chime,  
And gave him heart, and gave him time,  
Till every string’s according glee  
Was blended into harmony.  
And then, he said, he would full fain  
He could recall an ancient strain  
He never thought to sing again.  
It was not framed for village churls,  
But for high dames and mighty earls ;

He had play'd it to King Charles the good,  
 When he kept court at Holyrood ;  
 And much he wish'd, yet fear'd, to try  
 The long-forgotten melody.  
 Amid the strings his fingers stray'd,  
 And an uncertain warbling made,  
 Then oft he shook his hoary head  
 But when he caught the measure wild,  
 The old man raised his face, and smiled ;  
 And lighten'd up his faded eye,  
 With all a poet's ecstasy !  
 In varying cadence, soft or strong,  
 He swept the sounding chords along ;  
 The present scene, the future lot,  
 His toils, his wants, were all forgot :  
 Cold diffidence, and age's frost,  
 In the full tide of song were lost ;  
 Each blank in faithless memory void,  
 The poet's glowing thought supplied ;  
 And, while his harp responsive rung,  
 'Twas thus the Latest Minstrel sung.

The opening of the tale, thus given to the world, sets before us, in the simple and energetic style of Homer, what life was among those warlike border clans, who spread themselves, in the sixteenth century, along the rough frontier and fighting ground between England and Scotland. The graceful framework in which the old story is set may perhaps be a concession to the demands of poetry, as an art—to the unreasonable requirements of a reading, substituted (in an evil hour, as far as bards are concerned) for a listening generation. This remark, however, does not apply to the description of the feudal castle, where

Nine-and-twenty knights of fame  
 Hung their shields in Branksome-Hall ;  
 Nine-and-twenty squires of name  
 Brought them their steeds to bower from stall ;  
 Nine-and-twenty yeomen tall  
 Waited, duteous, on them all :  
 They were all knights of mettle true,  
 Kinsmen to the bold Buccleuch.

The whole picture, I say, of this gloomy fortress and its inhabitants carries us back far into the past. It is so instinct with the Homeric spirit, that I believe if, by some necromantic artifice, such as is resorted to in the second part of 'Faust,' these verses could have been made known to the Homeridæ, as judges of poetry, they would have at once discerned in their sound a likeness to the tones of their great ancestor, and would have unanimously voted to our Northern rhapsodist the freedom of Chios in a golden box. When, however, we get beyond these first paragraphs, I confess that, whilst I am reading the dialogue between the river spirit and the mountain spirit, a certain chill comes over me. This part of the poem strikes me as being written in a falsetto tone, and I miss the natural Walter Scott. It is not that he is weak in that most important element of genius, the power of dealing adequately with the supernatural—with the half-heard voices and fitful shadows that encompass the imagination, if not the life of man. Far from it, so far, that if the poet who wrote of Shakspere—

Within that circle none durst walk but he—

were now among us, the line would either not have been written at all, or would, at least, have been qualified by some reference to Walter Scott. The reason why we miss the ring of the true metal here, I take to be the temporary admixture with Scott's genius of a German alloy. He had been attracted by Monk Lewis, and, through him, by Goethe into Teutonic mythology. These outlandish legends are, I daresay, excellent of their kind and in their proper place, but they do not suit our Northern wolds. They do not harmonise with the brown man of the moors, or Lord Cranstoun's goblin page.

Each country has its own appropriate form of mystery—its collection of fables, half awful, and half attractive ; but they will not always bear transplanting. I think, therefore, that Scott might have found among the treasures of his native folk-lore, or might even have invented, some form of Border superstition

more homely and impressive, than these exotic mountain spirits and river spirits. They are phantoms which bring us into companionship with the printer's devil rather than with the genuine prince of darkness—with the imitator rather than with the real poet. To me, at any rate, it is a relief when I escape from these thin spectral voices to middle earth, and William of Deloraine:—

A stark moss-trooping Scot was he,  
As e'er couch'd Border lance by knee ;  
Through Solway sands, through Tarras moss,  
Blindfold, he knew the paths to cross ;  
By wily turns, by desperate bounds,  
Had baffled Percy's best blood-hounds ;  
In Eske or Liddel, fords were none,  
But he would ride them, one by one ;  
Alike to him was time or tide,  
December's snow, or July's pride ;  
Alike to him was tide or time,  
Moonless midnight, or matin prime :  
Steady of heart, and stout of hand,  
As ever drove prey from Cumberland.

It is not, however, till the Second Canto that the young writer, when he has ascertained his latent power, and measured his energies, begins to put forth his full strength. If the account of Deloraine's appearance before the walls of the moon-lighted abbey, if his interview with the aged monk, and his return to Branksome, with the mysterious book heavy upon his breast, be not fine poetry, I know not where, nor under what conditions, fine poetry is to be found. Let us, if you please, examine this part of the story a little in detail. The Knight starts on his mission, as an iron-hearted moss-trooper, a rider thoroughly trained up in all the ruthless lore of those Border wars. He is rough and indifferent to human life, though neither ungenerous nor revengeful; he is a man, in short, with the hard heart and unsleeping craft of the Red Indian, although, thanks to a sort of chivalrous and Christian instinct, without his meanness and cruelty. You would have thought him as inaccessible to all

influences that press upon the nerves of weaker men, as coldly impervious to fear as his sword—but he *has* a human soul and a living imagination beneath this iron crust ; so that, no sooner has he passed into a region where the power of crossing Solway sands, and of baffling Percy's best blood-hounds, becomes a useless accomplishment, than this Border Samson weakens at once, and is as another man.

Often had William of Deloraine  
 Rode through the battle's bloody plain,  
 And trampled down the warriors slain,  
 And neither known remorse nor awe ;  
 Yet now remorse and awe he own'd ;  
 His breath came thick, his head swam round ;  
 When this strange scene of death he saw,  
 Bewilder'd and unnerv'd he stood,  
 And the priest pray'd fervently and loud :  
 With eyes averted prayed he :  
 He might not endure the sight to see,  
 Of the man he had loved so brotherly.

And when the priest his death-prayer had pray'd,  
 Thus unto Deloraine he said :—  
 ‘Now, speed thee what thou hast to do,  
 Or, Warrior, we may dearly rue ;  
 For those, thou mayst not look upon,  
 Are gathering fast round the yawning stone !’  
 Then, Deloraine, in terror, took  
 From the cold hand the Mighty Book,  
 With iron clasp'd, and with iron bound :  
 He thought, as he took it, the dead man frown'd ;  
 But the glare of the sepulchral light,  
 Perchance, had dazzled the warrior's sight.

It is a shame to quote such a passage piecemeal ; one breath of inspiration runs through it, from beginning to end, and the whole scene ought to be before the hearer's imagination at once, but it is impossible, in a lecture like this, to recite whole cantos. There is, however, one paragraph, to which I would call your particular attention. Scott, as we all know, does not rank among the poets of thought, he is sneered at as superficial, commonplace, homely, and so on. These supposed demerits

of his are then contrasted with the exquisite subtleties and delicacies, with the deeper and rarer forms of the imagination, that have superseded his clumsy fluency, in the good graces of our professed critics. Yet, if we are satisfied with just thinking, which puts forward no metaphysical pretensions, and has nothing transcendental about it, we cannot fail to be struck by the sure-footed sagacity with which he tracks men's emotions home to their birth-place, and photographs, so to speak, a passing mood of the mind with an infallibility like that of the sun acting upon the artist's plate:—

Again on the Knight look'd the Churchman old,  
And again he sighed heavily ;  
For he had himself been a warrior bold,  
And fought in Spain and Italy.  
And he thought on the days that were long since by,  
When his limbs were strong, and his courage was high :  
Now, slow and faint, he led the way,  
Where, cloister'd round, the garden lay ;  
The pillar'd arches were over their head,  
And beneath their feet were the bones of the dead.

Spreading herbs, and flowerets bright,  
Glisten'd with the dew of night ;  
Nor herb, nor floweret, glisten'd there,  
But was carved in the cloister-arches as fair.  
The Monk gazed long on the lovely moon,  
Then into the night he look'd forth ;  
And red and bright the streamers light  
Were dancing in the glowing North.  
*So had he seen*, in fair Castile,  
The youth in glittering squadrons start ;  
Sudden the flying jennet wheel,  
And hurl the unexpected dart.  
He knew, by the streamers that shot so bright,  
That spirits were riding the northern light.

For three score years he has been wearing out with his knees  
the flint pavement of the Abbey cloisters, in bitter and possibly  
unavailing remorse ; for three score years the outside world has  
been unseen and unthought of, just as if it had ceased to exist.

If, during those three score years, he had ever looked out, from the monastery garden, upon former northern lights, they would have played before his eyes idly, and without a meaning—they would have awakened no memories of the past, no buried touches of association with the gallant knights and warlike exercises of Castile ; but the iron clang of Deloraine's armour, and the stately bearing of the dauntless cavalier, broke upon the dreary torpor that had gathered round his heart, the dreary mists of the cloister fled away like a vision of the night, and he was again the ardent youth, who

In Paynim countries had far trod,  
And fought beneath the cross of God.

This, to me, is the true kind of poetry ; I, at least, prefer it, as a rule, to what is known and admired as the Poetry of Thought. There is also a night piece in 'Marmion,' that has always delighted me, for the like reason ; I may perhaps be allowed to refer to it here, though somewhat out of its proper place, in order that we may avoid needless repetitions. You all of you recollect, I doubt not, how Marmion rode forth to encounter the phantom on Gifford Moor :—

So sore was the delirious goad,  
I took my steed and forth I rode,  
And, as the moon shone bright and cold,  
Soon reach'd the camp upon the wold.  
The southern entrance I pass'd through,  
Then halted, and my bugle blew.  
Methought an answer met my ear,—  
Yet was the blast so low and drear,  
So hollow, and so faintly blown,  
It might be echo of my own.

Thus judging, for a little space  
I listen'd, ere I left the place ;  
But scarce could trust my eyes,  
Nor yet can think they served me true,  
When sudden in the ring I view,  
In form distinct of shape and hue,  
A mounted champion rise.—

I've fought, Lord-Lyon, many a day,  
 In single fight, and mix'd affray,  
 And ever, I myself may say,  
     Have borne me as a knight ;  
 But when this unexpected foe  
 Seem'd starting from the gulf below,—  
 I care not though the truth I show,—  
     I trembled with affright ;  
 And as I placed in rest my spear,  
 My hand so shook for very fear,  
     I scarce could couch it right.

I have quoted enough to enable me to point out with what extreme skill, or rather, with how unerring an instinct, all the words in this narrative are chosen : Marmion *sees*, he has just told us so, ‘in form distinct of shape and hue, a mounted champion *rise*.’ We, however, are in the secret, and know that he has seen nothing of the kind. The phantom rode quietly into the ring, on Blount’s charger, borrowed for this very purpose, ten minutes before from the inn stable. But the single word *rise*, sets before us more effectively, than a long psychological paragraph in blank verse could do, how, in such conjunctures, the nervous system acts, how ghost stories grow up, because inference is unconsciously confounded with genuine observation.

To the imagination of Marmion, stung into feverish irritability by remorse, it was inevitable that the unexpected foe ‘seemed starting from the gulf below ;’ inevitable, that

Ne'er from vizor raised did glare  
 A human visage with a stare  
 So grimly and so ghast ;

inevitable, that when to good St. George he pray’d (there is a touch of Shaksperian humour in making this worldly master of statecraft—

who scarce received  
 For Gospel what the Church believed—

surrender himself at once to superstition under the influence of fear), the demon rider

Should, on his courser mounting light,  
Appear to vanish from his sight.

With how sure a touch, also, is presented to us the manner in which Marmion pours his half-confidences into Lindesay's ear. The oppression of these horrible thoughts was so great that he was driven to unbosom himself—in Shakspeare's words,

To cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff,  
That weight upon the heart;

but, in order to do so, he had to invent all the preliminaries.

Nought of the Palmer said he there,  
And nought of Constance or of Clare ;  
The thoughts that broke his sleep, he seems  
To mention but as feverish dreams.  
'In vain,' said he, 'to rest I spread  
My aching limbs, and couch'd my head :  
Fantastic thoughts returned ;  
And, by their wild dominion led,  
My heart within me burn'd.'

In answer to this, how forcibly must the wise old Scotchman's comment have fallen upon the guilty conscience—

'For seldom have such spirits power  
To harm, save in the evil hour  
When guilt we meditate within,  
Or harbour unrepented sin.'

De Wilton again, later on in the poem, gives his own account of the same transaction. With an equally accurate insight into the human mind, he is represented as quite in the dark about Marmion's superstitious fancies ; he believes that Marmion recognised him in the flesh, and that his enemy was cowed, not by preternatural terrors, but by the dread of an earthly vengeance—

'Oh then my helmed head he knew,  
The Palmer's cowl was gone.'

In such flashes of intuition are to be recognised, I think, the spirit of a master—a master of thinking, though the thoughts may never pass out of simple words, or take the forms of metaphysical analysis.

Coming back from this digression to the poem immediately before us, we may say that it proceeds, from first to last, with unfaltering spirit and power. I need hardly recall it to you, in all its details. Each canto opens, as you will recollect, with an outburst of poetry, purporting to be an expression of the minstrel's own feeling, ere he glides into the narrative again—these famous exordiums, as for instance—

He who would visit fair Melrose aright,  
Must visit it by the pale moonlight, &c. &c.—

have become so completely a part of the English language, that even Dr. Parr, eminent among the Whig depreciators of our stout-hearted Scotch Tory, could hardly, I should think, have escaped from their influence, by pretending to be ignorant of them. In spite, however, of their being so well known, one of these introductions I shall quote, because I think it possesses a subtler and more aerial beauty than is often found in our vigorous and straightforward writer. I should have expected to meet with such lines in 'Christabel,' or in some other of Coleridge's melodious dreams, rather than in one of Scott's plain bold epics.

Call it not vain :—they do not err,  
Who say, that when a Poet dies,  
Mute Nature mourns her worshipper,  
And celebrates his obsequies :  
Who say, tall cliff, and cavern lone,  
For the departed Bard make moan ;  
That mountains weep in crystal rill ;  
That flowers in tears of balm distil ;  
Through his loved groves that breezes sigh,  
And oaks, in deeper groan, reply ;  
And rivers teach their rushing wave  
To murmur dirges round his grave.

Not that, in sooth, o'er mortal urn  
 Those things inanimate can mourn ;  
 But that the stream, the wood, the gale,  
 Is vocal with the plaintive wail  
 Of those, who, else forgotten long,  
 Lived in the poet's faithful song,  
 And, with the poet's parting breath,  
 Their memory feels a second death.  
 The Maid's pale shade, who wails her lot,  
 That love, true love, should be forgot,  
 From rose and hawthorn shakes the tear  
 Upon the gentle Minstrel's bier :  
 The phantom Knight, his glory fled,  
 Mourns o'er the field he heap'd with dead,  
 Mounts the wild blast that sweeps amain,  
 And shrieks along the battle plain :  
 The Chief, whose antique crownlet long  
 Has sparkled in the feudal song,  
 Now, from the mountain's misty throne,  
 Sees, in the thanedom once his own,  
 His ashes undistinguished lie ;  
 His place, his power, his memory die ;  
 His groans the lonely caverns fill,  
 His tears of rage impel the rill :  
 All mourn the Minstrel's harp unstrung,  
 Their name unknown, their praise unsung.

I have not however time, with 'Marmion' scarcely touched upon, to linger over the 'Lay.' I will only repeat that I think Scott took more pains with it than he did with any subsequent poem. In proof of this, I could point out to you the exquisite art with which the ballads of Albert Græme, from the Debateable Lands, of Fitzraver, from the Italianised civilisation of England, of Harold, from the storm-swept Orcades, are attuned, as it were, in different keys, according to their different schools of song.

Again, let us remark upon the *curiosa felicitas* of Deloraine's vision at the end of the poem.

At length, by fits, he darkly told,  
 With broken hint, and shuddering cold—  
 That he had seen, right certainly,

*A shape with amice wrapp'd around,  
With a wrought Spanish baldric bound,  
Like pilgrim from beyond the sea ;  
And knew—but how it matter'd not—  
It was the wizard, Michael Scott.*

The repetition of the lines in italics, from the second canto, is not only distinctly impressive in itself, but also of great value, as enabling the poet to escape from the conventional flatness of an ordinary conclusion—‘and so they were married, and lived happily ever afterwards.’ It opens a way for him to end magnificently with a noble translation, or rather adaptation, of the *Dies Irae*; so that the reader is dismissed to the sound of that grand monkish hymn pealing around him, like a cathedral organ, and pleading with solemn intensity for the soul of the penitent necromancer, before the throne of a merciful God.

Of Walter Scott’s three principal poems—if ‘The Lay of the Last Minstrel’ attracts us more by its freshness and originality, and ‘The Lady of the Lake’ by its grace and tenderness—yet, as far as I can judge, ‘Marmion’ unquestionably stands first in point of power; there is, I think, no story of its kind in our language that I place above it; none, at any rate, since the knight’s tale in Chaucer.

Dryden’s fables, violently praised by critics contemporary with Scott, are no doubt fine specimens of versification. But his ‘Palamon and Arcite,’—besides that it is rather a love-story than a battle-song—is, after all, only Chaucer over again—Chaucer vulgarised and grown coarse; whilst ‘Theodore and Honoria,’ full of strength as it is, and though displaying more imagination than is usually found in Dryden’s Rhymed Heroics, seems to me revolting rather than sublime. For Byron’s Eastern Tales, now fallen somewhat in public estimation since his premature death, I still acknowledge a weakness. Energetic, however, and passionate though they be, it would be hard to name one among them which fills the same space in our literature as this ‘Tale of Flodden

Field.' 'Marmion,' indeed, in one respect, made his appearance under certain disadvantages. Scott was, I believe, misled by the success of the beautiful introductory passages (I have already referred to them), in 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel,' and thought fit to repeat the process more elaborately, and on a larger scale in his second poem. But the attempt was not crowned with the same success. He was perhaps tempted into this experiment by the opportunity which it afforded him of showing forth to the world, in defiance of the Edinburgh Whigs, his ardent and unquenchable Toryism. But after all, even Tories must admit, this was a moral and not a literary excellence, and it is a pity that he did not reserve the exhibition of it for some other time. He forgot that, whereas those little prefaces in 'The Lay of the Last Minstrel' were living portions of a true and living song, these longer addresses to the Rev. John Marriott, and other forgotten notabilities of the day, rose up, like dead walls, between the natural divisions of his poem. Now this misfortune is all the greater, inasmuch as the construction of the tale is a perfect triumph of art ; there is nothing better of the kind, perhaps nothing so good, in his prose romances. However, this being once understood, we can pass these interludes over, to be read by themselves when we please, without reference to Marmion ; and then in despite of John Marriott, George Ellis, or other tiresome interlopers, we can enjoy the admirable shaping and development of the plot without interruption.

Hostile critics tell us, since they cannot impugn his power of managing a narrative, that Scott is not to be accounted great, because he has written little which men are accustomed to quote, as men quote passages from Horace or Pope. I have not time to stop and enquire whether the same thing might not be said of Homer ; at any rate it does not seem to be an infallible criterion of good poetry, even if the statement were true. An image, a description, a burst of passion, may be excellent

in its place, which, if detached from its natural surroundings, would be more or less disfigured or smirched—just as a firefly or other brilliant insect, pinned down in a drawer after death, is robbed of half the gloss and splendour that coloured its life. But, in the second place, is the statement true? I should have said, on the contrary, that, though epigrammatic beauty and polished compactness of style be not what he aims at (and these are the qualities to which men who quote usually turn), few writers imprint themselves on the mind more easily or firmly. Let us take, for instance, the introduction of De Wilton in the first canto. We have been prepared for him so skilfully by the mysterious hints of George Selby, as to feel sure that he is destined to play an important part in the story about to be told. We therefore wait for his arrival in breathless expectation. And it is thus he comes :—

When as the Palmer came in hall,  
Nor lord, nor knight, was there more tall,  
Or had a statelier step withal,  
Or look'd more high and keen ;  
For no saluting did he wait,  
But strode across the hall of state,  
And fronted Marmion where he sate,  
As he his peer had been.  
But his gaunt frame was worn with toil ;  
His cheek was sunk, alas the while !  
And when he struggled at a smile,  
His eye look'd haggard wild :  
Poor wretch ! the mother that him bare,  
If she had been in presence there,  
In his wan face, and sun-burnt hair,  
She had not known her child.  
Danger, long travel, want, and woe,  
Soon change the form that best we know—  
For deadly fear can time outgo,  
And blanch at once the hair ;  
Hard toil can roughen form and face,  
And want can quench the eye's bright grace,  
Nor does old age a wrinkle trace  
More deeply than despair.  
Happy whom none of these befall,  
But this poor Palmer knew them all.

Again, in the second book, who does not remember the Trial of Constance? It is full of passages that, once read, can never be forgotten. The gloomy power with which the Dark Justice-chamber of the Abbey, with its inexorable judges, is pourtrayed, and the passionate energy of the unhappy nun's defence, or rather expostulation, are too well known to need enlarging upon.

But though I refrain from further quotations, I cannot help asking you to observe with what vigour of imagination the death of Constance is made, by means of some spiritual affinity, as it were, to throw a shadow upon the haughty heart of Marmion. Out of this over-shadowing gloom, arises, on the instant, superstitious terror and helpless remorse. And we are shown, in the magic mirror of poetry, the hidden soul of the ruthless betrayer—a soul torn by conflicting emotions, till it is altogether unhinged; unhinged, in spite of its natural strength and long habits of worldly experience, to the surprise of his unsophisticated squire:—

For little did Fitz-Eustace know,  
That passions, in contending flow,  
    Unfix the strongest mind;  
Wearyed from doubt to doubt to flee,  
We welcome fond credulity,  
    Guide confident, though blind.

To proceed, however. If passages specially fitted for quotation are necessary to establish a poet's fame, where shall we find an answer given to a hostile sovereign more dignified—more forcible—more becoming—than the answer given by Marmion to James in the fifth book?

As coming from an ambassador penetrated with the responsibility of his position, from a veteran statesman and soldier alive to all the evils of war, it is impossible to desire a reply firmer, more spirited, and yet more temperate than that of the English Envoy, when King James indulges his spleen in bitter

sarcasms against him and England, amid the festivities of Holyrood:—

Displeased was James that stranger view'd  
And tamper'd with his changing mood.  
'Laugh those that can, weep those that may'  
(Thus did the fiery Monarch say,)  
'Southward I march by break of day ;  
And if within Tantallon strong  
The good Lord Marmion tarries long,  
Perchance our meeting next may fall  
At Tamworth, in his castle-hall.'—  
The haughty Marmion felt the taunt,  
And answer'd grave that royal vaunt,  
'Much honour'd were my humble home,  
If in its halls King James should come ;  
But Nottingham has archers good,  
And Yorkshire men are stern of mood ;  
Northumbrian prickers wild and rude.  
On Derby hills the paths are steep ;  
In Ouse and Tyne the fords are deep ;  
And many a banner will be torn,  
And many a knight to earth be borne,  
*And many a sheaf of arrows spent,*  
Ere Scotland's King shall cross the Trent.'

But whilst Marmion is thus displaying the better qualities of his nature at Holyrood, earthly agencies are at work to overthrow all his cherished schemes. The powers of Darkness also are mustering their strength against him. They are allowed by God to add his fate to the fate of those anxious thousands, for whom life is about to end, and eternity to begin, on the hitherto unnoticed pastures and sheepwalks of Flodden. With the same mastery of his art that has been shown throughout, Walter Scott brings us nearer and nearer to the identification of his mysterious Palmer with the dishonoured and exiled knight, Ralph de Wilton. It is to his own hand that the Abbess, in her ignorance, entrusts the proof of the treacheries employed to ruin him, the proofs of his rival's guilt. On receiving these all-important papers, the emotion of the Palmer is visible to the Abbess at once; but, though we seem to be on the brink

of a discovery and a confession, the end is not yet. By a happy accident, the demon summons, addressed to those about to fall at Flodden, intervenes with wonderful effect, and still the interest of the story is suspended and maintained. This citation, Scott informs us, is mentioned by all the Scotch historians of the time, and he adds, for the benefit, no doubt, of Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, together with their Southern clients, that it was probably an attempt, by those adverse to the war, to impose upon the superstitious temper of James. Very likely, but we know, nevertheless, that Scott has no real belief in any such modern and cockney probability, and that his faith —the faith, at any rate, of his nerves and imagination, is as undoubting as that of any of the historians whose authority he affects to undervalue. Happily, as undoubting—because therefore it is, that the vision, seen by us through his eyes, is so full of spirit and genuine life.

Then on its battlements they saw  
A Vision, passing Nature's law—

Yet darkly did it seem, as there  
Heralds and pursuivants prepare,  
With trumpet sound and blazon fair,  
A summons to proclaim :

It flits, expands, and shifts, till loud,  
From midmost of the spectre crowd,  
This awful summons came :—

' Prince, prelate, potentate, and peer,  
Whose names I now shall call,  
Scottish, or foreigner, give ear ;  
I summon one and all :

I cite you by each deadly sin,  
That e'er hath soil'd your hearts within :

By wrath, by pride, by fear,  
By each o'er-mastering passion's tone,  
By the dark grave, and dying groan !

When forty days are pass'd and gone,  
 I cite you, at your Monarch's throne,  
     To answer and appear.'  
 Then thunder'd forth a roll of names :  
 The first was thine, unhappy James !  
     Then all thy nobles came ;  
  
 And Marmion, Lord of Fontenaye,  
 Of Lutterward, and Scrivelbaye ;  
 De Wilton, erst of Aberley,  
     The self-same thundering voice did say.

What an air of truth does the lawyerlike accuracy of the demon herald give, in 'De Wilton, erst of Aberley,' and how fine, on the other hand, is the poetical vagueness of

But then *another* spoke :  
 ' Thy fatal summons I deny,  
 And thine infernal lord defy,  
 Appealing me to Him on High  
     Who burst the sinner's yoke.'

One more step is made, which brings us to the very threshold of the Secret, but even yet it remains unrevealed.

At that dread accent, with a scream,  
 Parted the pageant like a dream,  
     The Summoner was gone.  
 Prone on her face the Abbess fell,  
 And fast, and fast, her beads did tell ;  
 Her nuns came, startled by the yell,  
     And found her there alone.  
 She mark'd not, at the scene aghast,  
 What time, or how, the Palmer pass'd.

We have now brought Marmion down 'to the rough edge of battle, where it joins.' In my last lecture, it was as the poet of war—that is of human nature, with all its noblest and all its meanest impulses alike in a state of tension—as the northern heir of Homer in those moods when

The meeting of his champions proud  
 Is like the bursting thundercloud,

that I professed an allegiance to Scott. And in this respect, I

maintain, that, among modern poets, he stands supreme. But the clock warns me that I cannot discuss this claim of his adequately on the present occasion. To adopt the words of Attila, as the sun went down upon the plain of Chalons, whilst the fiercest and bloodiest world-fight recorded in history was yet roaring around—‘He has not time to conquer to-night.’

## LECTURE VI.

WALTER SCOTT—CONTINUED.

BEFORE coming to the battle canto in ‘Marmion,’ I wish to explain and qualify a little what I have said about Scott as compared with Homer. It is where Homer displays that quality somewhat difficult to define, but recognised readily enough when we meet with it, and known as poetical spirit, that the resemblance I insist upon is especially to be found. Now, though we are always attracted, if not fascinated, by this gift with its half-spiritual and half-physical influence, there are, no doubt, elements in poetry that rank higher—elements and powers, to which it bears much the same relation as brilliant military marches bear to the sublimer creations of Handel or Beethoven. It is hardly necessary to say that I am not comparing the whole of Scott with the whole of Homer. Parts of ‘The Iliad,’—the interview of Priam with Achilles after the death of Hector, for instance—are beyond the genius of Scott. And the exquisite pictures in ‘The Odyssey’ belong to another department of poetry altogether. I say this, because having turned a few lines of Homer into Scott, not for their own sake, but just by way of illustration, I do not wish you to infer that the whole of ‘The Iliad,’ still less the whole of ‘The Odyssey,’ can be adequately interpreted by the octo-syllabics of ‘Marmion.’ Under the immense variety of thought, and feeling, and passion, and imagination, summed up in the one word Homer, any single metre now possessed by the English language must, I fear, break down.

Nay, I have sometimes doubted whether there be any good

reason why these two famous old poems should be Englished, as the phrase, now perhaps obsolete, used to run, in one and the same measure throughout. Why they should have been originally composed in one and the same measure throughout there are many excellent reasons, but none of them apply to us. Neither Pope nor Lord Derby were obliged to know by heart all they had written, in order that they might declaim their verses in a certain key of recitation, according to a traditional rhythm, for the benefit of a crowd of listeners, every man of them alike unable to read. Again, we are now in an age of printed books, poetry is a luxury, or little more, instead of being, as it then was, the only means of instruction ; or if that be demurred to, at any rate the surest and easiest method of transmitting, from one generation to another, such events as were fit to be recorded in a national song ; it cannot therefore now be necessary to take such especial care that these songs should at once pass—should, as it were, flow down in an unbroken channel, from one memory to another. It occurred to me, accordingly, that as a translator moved through Homer's various styles, he might also move from the metre he had been using to a new one. That he might try, by constant changes and alternations, to rival, more or less, the many excellences that are united in the classical hexameter. I am bound to add, that, on submitting this fancy of mine to the existing high priest of the Bard, I mean to Mr. Gladstone, as well as to other critics, in whose judgment I had confidence, it was received with more or less disfavour. Hence, nothing was left for me but to confess myself mistaken, and to shuffle out of the proposition as well as I could. The result, therefore, is that, so far as I am concerned, we remain in this position, For much of Homer, our blank verse is, in my opinion, too heavy and stilted ; for other portions the ballad metre, though often to be employed with excellent effect, is too loose and broken-backed ; the rhymed heroic, again, though occasionally very suitable, is, as a rule, too artificial and too cramping for that ancient river of

poetry, when it has to be forced into a new channel. Whilst as to the so-called English hexameter, with its six false quantities, to my Eton ear and eye, in every line, I hate it so, that I am not a fair judge. Repressing, however, my private and personal abhorrence, as an impartial critic I would ask, whether the classical hexameter itself was not a very ugly and tuneless measure until great artists had taught it to flow in protracted cadences and sonorous undulations. That this was the case in Latin we know, and if we had the original præ-Homeric hexameters, we should probably find that the early rhapsodists of Greece hobbled and limped along much in the same manner. In England, up to this time at any rate, no such artists have arisen ;<sup>1</sup> when they do, we shall be ready to listen to them. Having said this much, I will quote a few lines which caught my eye by accident the other day—lines carrying us back at once to Branksome Castle, and seeming as if they ought to have been written on Tweed side, by Sir Walter Homer of that ilk :—

Fifty swift ships, the King—heaven-graced,  
Achilles, led to Troy; in each  
Fifty stout comrades, fitly placed,  
Row'd on their vessel to the beach.  
To rule each ten barks, captains five,  
In whom he trusted, came at call;  
But he, the bravest knight alive,  
Was High Chief over all.

The second passage which struck me, whilst accidentally turning over the leaves of ‘The Iliad,’ as having a decided likeness to the style and manner of Scott, occurs in the same book; it is a little longer than the paragraph just quoted. In both cases, I must ask you to take the Greek for granted, and to remember that for the moment I am not so much translating Homer as be-Scottifying him by way of illustration :—

<sup>1</sup> Lord Houghton, in one of his early volumes, showed, I think, although he confined himself to very short flights, more skill than I have seen elsewhere.

Don these my arms ; 'tis time indeed  
 On to this field my clan to lead,  
 My Myrmidons, who take their way  
 Ever with joy to battle fray :  
 For, round our ships, the thunder cloud  
 Of Trojan war sweeps on apace,  
 And pressed together, crowd on crowd,  
 Along the rough edge of the deep,  
 Their ground our men can scarcely keep,  
 So narrow is the space.  
 Ah, had Lord Agamemnon willed  
 To do me right, here, as they fled,  
 Hot on their track, we should have filled  
 Yon trenches to the brim with dead ;  
 Not watch their circling ranks begin  
 To hem our broken army in.  
 Not now, in hands of Diomed,  
 Mad in its wrath, the spear burns red  
 To guard from death each Argive head ;  
 Nor hear I still, through lips accurst,  
 Your Agamemnon's war-cry burst,  
 'Tis the man-quelling Hector's shout  
 That breaks around us, ringing out  
 To cheer his Trojans on :  
 Who, giving back that call again,  
 Thrill through with yells the whole wide plain,  
 And count the battle won.

You will understand, no doubt, that in offering to you these hasty adaptations from 'The Iliad,' my object has been not to accomplish any feat in the way of translation, but simply to put before you, as distinctly as possible, the Marmion element, discernible among many other elements, in the great Lay of the Acheans, and from thence to pass on to our modern epic.

It was the Duke of Wellington, I think, who said on some occasion, that a battle was very like a ball—that everyone knows, at each particular moment, with whom he is dancing, and who is dancing opposite to him, but is unable to realise, as a whole, the general progress of the entertainment. Poets have not been slow to feel this ; and, accordingly, the artifice of placing the ebbs and flows of a battle, or the changing aspects

of any great procession, or solemn public event, under the eye of a spectator ; nominally for the purpose of being described to some less experienced companion, really for the benefit of the Singer's audience, suggested itself long ago. We find Helen, in this manner, pointing out to Priam and his senate, from the walls of Troy, all the leaders of the Achæan host. This, I think, is the earliest instance of a form of poetical invention that has been constantly produced ever since ; though none of Homer's imitators have yet equalled the beauty and pathos of his concluding verses :—

But there are two—Leaders of men, whom here  
I cannot find at all—my brethren dear—  
Steed-mastering Castor; with the cestus strong  
His twin; Me too with them one mother bore.  
Either, from lovely Lacedæmon's shore,  
They have not crossed the other chiefs among,  
Or, if in ships that brave the sea, they came,  
They go not down to battle, dreading shame  
And ceaseless taunts that hover round my name.  
She spake; but these long since, within her breast,  
Sparta, their mother earth, had lulled to rest.

Euripides, in the '*Phœnissæ*', is the next writer, so far as I recollect, who adopts this device. The old family servant shows to the young Antigone those haughty leaders who, on behalf of Polynices, are marshalling their host to destroy her native Thebes. Anything like a careful research would, I doubt not, guide us to many other passages of a similar kind ; certainly this poetical stratagem did not spring, like Minerva in full armour, from the brain of Goethe. From him, by certain Philo-Teutons, Scott is accused of borrowing it. Personally, I presume to think, that Scott, like Capulet's servant in '*Romeo and Juliet*', had a head to find out so much for himself, without troubling Peter or Goethe in the matter.

However this may be, he has turned this inherited poetical device, both in his novels and his poems, to excellent account. It is true, that, on looking into the battle-scene of '*Marmion*',

the outside spectators do not so much narrate, as discuss with one another, what they see. Practically, however, by conversing together, they narrate to us, and to Clara de Clare. It is thus that the poet enables his readers to see what was shown to Blunt and Fitz Eustace, and to no one else. As they stood apart, they overlook the progress of the battle as a whole. The combat at the Trosacks, again, is related by one who had seen it, unexpectedly, from a distance—but it is not related at the moment of its taking place—so that one element of a picturesque character is lost to it; I mean, the vivid sense of change and surprise, coming as suddenly on the narrator himself as upon those who listen. In the novel of ‘Old Mortality’ we get perhaps still nearer to the orthodox form of this literary invention. Cuddie Headrigg and Henry Mortop talk eagerly about the skirmish, as it fluctuates before them, and thus explain its more important vicissitudes to Kettledrummle and Cuddie’smother, as they arise.

Here also the dramatic element is brought in with very great power. The retreat of Claverhouse, under the bitter Ezekiel-like denunciations of the grim old Puritan widow, passes into another, perhaps into a higher, department of poetry.

As for the poetical invention itself, it is in ‘Ivanhoe,’ I think, that it appears among us moderns under its noblest aspect. How tame and commonplace does Goethe’s commonplace soldier, climbing a tree to overlook the distant battle with perfect safety to himself, appear, when compared with the picture of Rebecca, standing before the open window, above the defences of Torquilstone—Rebecca steeled against fear by the engrossing influence of her unhappy passion, and exposing herself eagerly, rather than fearfully, to the slings and arrows of the besiegers, in order to describe to her wounded companion the progress of the struggle, on which both their fates depend.

How much is the force of the whole scene enhanced by her ignorance of all that she is describing, and by the impatient corrections of Ivanhoe, from his bed of fever, whenever she falls

into a technical error ; by our knowledge, and his ignorance, of the emotions fighting at her heart, which lead her to disregard danger, and to welcome death if he comes, as a comforter and a friend.<sup>1</sup>

In ‘Marmion,’ however, as I said before, it is a conference rather than a pure narrative that is set before us.

Sadly to Blount did Eustace say,  
 ‘Unworthy office here to stay !  
 No hope of gilded spurs to-day.—  
 But see ! look up !—on Flodden bent  
 The Scottish foe has fired his tent.’

And sudden, as he spoke,  
 From the sharp ridges of the hill,  
 All downward to the banks of Till,  
 Was wreathed in sable smoke. &c. &c.

We are not told whether this was a tactical scheme, adopted to baffle the English archers, and to enable the Scottish men-at-arms to bring their swords and axes into standing fight, without seeing beforehand, according to the Song of Chevy Chase, ‘the gray goose feather on the English shafts,’ wet in the heart’s blood of their best and bravest. I suppose Scott derived this fact from some historical source ; if he did, the stratagem may have been so intended, may even, it appears, have been partially successful. Whether this were so or not, we may be sure that many a gallant English knight and yeoman must have unconsciously repeated in spirit, the noble prayer of Ajax in ‘The Iliad’—must have vowed silver candlesticks and hides of land to his patron saint, if only he were permitted to face death by daylight.

Oh that some friend were here to go,  
 And bear the tidings dread  
 To Peleus’ son ; for well I know  
 He has not heard this tale of woe,  
 How his lov’d comrade, stricken low,  
 Upon the plain lies dead.

<sup>1</sup> These sheets were in the printer’s hands before I read ‘Harold,’ or I should of course have dwelt upon Mr. Tennyson’s effective revival of the old device.

But none such now can I behold,  
For cloud on cloud, about us rolled,  
Had wrapped both man and horse in night.  
Oh, Father Zeus, to thee we pray ;  
Scatter this evil gloom away,  
Fill once again the air with light,  
To our dulled eyes, give back their sight,  
Then slay us underneath the sun ;  
If such thy will—that will be done.

This darkness—heaven-sent against the Greeks, man-created against the English—in neither case lasted long. How the prayer of Ajax was answered, though he said nothing about candlesticks or hecatombs, we all know.

He spoke, the Father God on high,  
In pity o'er him, whilst he wept,  
Flung light into the shaking sky ;  
As off the shrouding gloom he swept,  
Out flashed the sun. On every side  
The war up-started, wild and wide ;  
And Ajax shouted straight with speed,  
To Menelaus, good at need.

It is perhaps not out of place to remark here, that the Northern Point of Honour, identifying manliness with an absolute repression of the softer emotions, under grief or pain, had no place among the Greeks. Ajax himself, though the hardest specimen of heroism in the rough that Homer presents to us, has no more sense of self-abasement, because he gives way to tears on the death of his friend, than if he were a girl of fifteen. Grief, to him, like hunger or thirst, is a natural appetite to be appeased by yielding moderately to its requirements. Still less does the haughty Achilles, when these evil tidings reach the camp, put any restraint upon his passionate sorrow. Prone on the ground, he mutters and weeps among the captive women, until his mother goddess, accompanied by her sisters, rises up to mitigate his despair by the prospect of revenge.

We need not discuss the question in all its bearings. Some of us may think that this Northern stoicism, though perhaps,

upon the whole, the higher condition of mind, does not bring with it unmixed advantages—they may believe that, if our rugged ancestors gained thereby much of strength and practical energy in the hour of trial, they also lost much on the side of spontaneity and liveliness of feeling, and that this unyielding temper of the Northern nerves was derived, mainly, it may be, from their greater robustness, but also, to a certain degree, from their partial ossification.

We can see something of the kind in the case of the Red Indian, who pays to this form of the point of honour an exaggerated devotion. By him we are regarded with pitying contempt, because, though tough enough in all conscience, tears are not absolutely prohibited.

The spirit of the white man's heaven  
Forbids not you to weep.

That is the view taken by a model Cherokee. Looked at from the other side, we might perhaps have appeared to the Greek of Homer's time much as the Huron, of legend it may be, rather than of history, now appears to us.

To return, however, from this digression. The direct intervention of Zeus restores light to the Achæans. On Flodden, the fighting men of England are indebted to nothing more than the ordinary agencies of Nature.

At length the freshening western blast  
Aside the shroud of battle cast ;  
And, first, the ridge of mingled spears  
Above the brightening cloud appears ;  
And in the smoke the pennons flew,  
As in the storm the white sea-mew.

A very fine and picturesque simile, by the way. Many of Scott's noble images miss their due meed of admiration, because he makes no fuss about them.

Then mark'd they, dashing broad and far,  
The broken billows of the war,

And plumèd crests of chieftains brave,  
 Floating like foam upon the wave ;  
 But nought distinct they see :  
 Wide raged the battle on the plain ;  
 Spears shook, and falchions flash'd amain ;  
 Fell England's arrow-flight like rain ;  
 Crests rose, and stoop'd, and rose again,  
 Wild and disorderly.  
 Amid the scene of tumult, high  
 They saw Lord Marmion's falcon fly :  
 And stainless Tunstall's banner white  
 Bear itself bravely in the fight :  
 Although against them come,

described, as Homer would have described them—the choicest troops of Scotland. It was there that Scotland was the strongest; with her left wing, far in the distance, defeat was busy—

But Fortune, on the right,  
 With fickle smile, cheer'd Scotland's fight.  
 But still Lord Marmion's falcon flew  
 The Border slogan rent the sky !  
 Loud were the clanging blows ;  
 Advanced,—forced back,—now low, now high,  
 As bends the bark's mast in the gale,  
 When rent are rigging, shrouds, and sail,  
 It waver'd 'mid its foes.

Till, at the last, in spite of the gallant onset of Blount and his companions, ‘like pine-tree rooted from the ground,’ it falls not to rise again.

Of the death of Marmion I shall say little more, than that ominous song of the Fourth Canto—

In the last battle, borne down by the flying,  
 There shall he be lying,

is repeated here, as it rises up before the soul of the doomed sinner, with solemn effect.

But if these struggles of remorse and despair are finely painted, still finer is the poetic art, by the help whereof the

warlike Baron is dismissed from life, whilst all the noble qualities of his nature are in the ascendant—like his wounds, it might perhaps be said, all in front. Hence, if we may so speak without irreverence, the first thing to strike the all-seeing eye, when the spirit comes before it for judgment—will not be its heartless treachery against Constance, nor the miserable self-seeking that made light of crime and dishonour to attain its ends ; but the unselfish loyalty of a patriotic soldier and statesman, who loves his country so deeply that, when her interests are at stake, even the terrors of the grave cease to appal him ; whatever may happen afterwards, it matters not. His last thought must be hers.

The fact is, that Scott's ineradicable sympathy with a powerful and masculine character, depraved though it might be, and distorted from its original promise, led him, almost without his own consent, to keep alive an interest for one

who died a gallant knight,  
With sword in hand for England's right.

Under some such influence Shakspere also, I fancy, takes leave of Macbeth with a certain tenderness—takes leave of him as of one born for better things. His illusions have ceased to dazzle him ; his hopes are maliciously baffled, and his ill-gotten empire is broken up, like morning mists. But when the end comes, calamity acts upon him like a tonic, and his higher qualities are recalled once more to confront the presence of death. He is lifted by the sense of military honour, suspended but not extinguished within him, out of the slough of tyranny, suspicion, and selfish fear ; and, therefore, as he has lived the life, so is he allowed to die the death, of a soldier.

Before passing on from 'Marmion,' I may just mention a fact, which has, unless I am mistaken, come to light very lately. I mention it as a further illustration of what I meant in my last lecture, when I was talking about the representative power of Scott's imagination, and his justness of thought.

One great proof of this, I take to be, the skilful precision with which he fuses together his picturesque fancy, with the conclusions of a wide practical experience, and a keen estimate of all human probabilities. You will recollect, I doubt not, that Marmion was buried, not in Lichfield Cathedral, as proposed, not as a baron of high rank and great position, but carelessly and in a nameless grave ; whilst a humble Scotch peasant took his place, by some mistake, under the stately canopy intended for the English baron. Now it has just been ascertained, as I am told, that such a mistake did really occur in the case of the Archbishop of St. Andrews.<sup>1</sup> This Prelate, a natural son of James IV., seems to have been one of those marvellous youths born only to die, who give us a melancholy feeling that whatever man has done, human nature may still have been defrauded of possibilities greater than anything yet brought to perfection. He was little more than a boy when he accompanied his father to Flodden, and fell with him there.

His friends, according to the common belief, recovered his body, and buried it under the high altar of St. Andrews. Recent investigations, however, made I know not why, having been made, it turns out that the skeleton so interred, instead of being the skeleton of a young man of twenty, must have belonged to a veteran soldier forty years old at the least. I say a veteran soldier, because the traces of older wounds that had not proved fatal are still discernible upon the remains. It is obvious, therefore, that the quasi-historical details invented by Scott

To point a moral, and adorn a tale,

are, in a certain sense, actually true—and true of the very battle to which he has appropriated them. This surely has not happened according to blind chance—not through a mere coincidence. But because Scott's insight into the heart of life was unerring. Because he had a power of extracting the spirit

<sup>1</sup> I state this fact on the authority of the Dean of Westminster.

of history out of vast masses of knowledge, duly assimilated and digested, as the bee gathers her honey from a thousand flowers. The death of Marmion, however, important as it may be to the story before us, still leaves the public character of the battle, and the epic interest of a great war unexhausted, and almost unexplored. The finest statue in the last Paris Exhibition was one of a dying soldier. He still grasps the broken sword ; he still confronts in the spirit those implacable enemies, whom his nerveless arm and perishing body can no longer struggle against in the flesh.

Upon the pedestal of this statue these memorable words are inscribed ‘Gloria Victis.’ Actuated by feelings akin to those of the French sculptor, the greatest among Scotchmen has shed a pathetic light upon the ruins of a terrible national disaster.

But as they left the dark’ning heath,  
More desperate grew the strife of death.  
The English shafts in volleys hail’d,  
In headlong charge their horse assail’d ;  
Front, flank, and rear, the squadrons sweep  
To break the Scottish circle deep,  
That fought around their King.  
But yet, though thick the shafts as snow,  
Though charging knights like whirlwinds go,  
Though bill-men ply the ghastly blow,  
Unbroken was the ring ;  
The stubborn spear-men still made good  
Their dark impenetrable wood,  
Each stepping where his comrade stood,  
The instant that he fell.  
No thought was there of dastard flight ;  
Link’d in the serried phalanx tight,  
Groom fought like noble, squire like knight,  
As fearlessly and well ;  
Till utter darkness closed her wing  
O’er their thin host and wounded King.  
Then skilful Surrey’s sage commands  
Led back from strife his shatter’d bands ;  
And from the charge they drew,  
As mountain-waves, from wasted lands  
Sweep back to Ocean blue. &c. &c.

Again, I ask, where, out of Homer, will you find so grand a song of battle? and it is all the grander to us, because it is not a hymn of victory, but of sublime defiance, under the frowns of hostile fortune. It belongs, I think, to the finer instincts of humanity, to the finer instincts of our British nature, at any rate, that we take more interest in defeat bravely met, in crushing misfortunes nobly confronted, than in any ordinary triumph. Take Leonidas at Thermopylæ : his presence is more alive within us, than that of Themistocles at Salamis, or the Athenians at Marathon. ‘Nothing succeeds like success’ is the common proverb. This may be so in commerce, in diplomacy, in politics ; but wherever the great faculty of the imagination, without which the salt of life would lose its savour, exercises dominion, it is not true. If nothing, under all circumstances, succeeded like success, a mortal wound would be inflicted on poetry. We should have no Prometheus, no Antigone, no Ajax, no Juliet, no Desdemona, no Hamlet. I might even go further ; but I do not wish to pass out of my own department into higher regions, and, accordingly, I forbear.

This instinct acts so decisively upon Walter Scott, that patriotic as he was, actually the most ardent of Scotchmen, the defeats of his country light up within him a stronger poetical fire than her proudest triumphs. His ‘Flodden’ is written in a far grander epic style than his ‘Bannockburn.’ Nay, so keenly is he alive to such influences, that even there, even in his ‘Lord of the Isles,’ it is not so much the victorious shouts of his advancing countrymen, as the brave, though fruitless resistance of the overmatched English archery—as the unselfish temper and bright chivalrous impulses of the dying English knight, D’Argentine, that awaken the most intense sympathy in the soul of our high-hearted poet.

Awhile, with stubborn hardihood,  
Their English hearts the strife made good.  
Borne down at length on every side,  
Compell’d to flight, they scatter wide.—

Let stags of Sherwood leap for glee,  
 And bound the deer of Dallom-Lee !  
 The broken bows of Bannock's shore  
 Shall in the greenwood ring no more !  
 Round Wakefield's merry May-pole now,  
 The maids may twine the summer bough,  
 May northward look with longing glance,  
 For those who used to lead the dance,  
 For the blithe archers look in vain !

Now cumbering Bannock's bloody plain.

There is another beautiful tribute to the hostile archers, as a fine and peculiar type of English manhood, in the dramatic sketch of 'Halidon Hill.'

SWINTON.

De Vipont, thou look'st sad ?

DE VIPONT.

It is because I hold a Templar's sword  
 Wet to the cross'd hilt with Christian blood.

SWINTON.

The blood of English archers—what can gild  
 A Scottish blade more bravely ?

DE VIPONT.

Even therefore grieve I for those gallant yeomen,  
 England's peculiar and appropriate sons,  
 Known in no other land. Each boasts his hearth  
 And field as free as his lord's barony,  
 Owing subjection to no vassalage,  
 Save to their King and Law. Hence are they resolute,  
 Leading the van on ev'ry day of battle,  
 As men who know the blessings they defend.  
 Hence are they frank and generous in peace,  
 As men who have their portion in its plenty.  
 No other kingdom shows such worth and happiness  
 Veil'd in such low estate—therefore I mourn them.

It is true, no doubt, that this eulogy is put into the mouth of a crusader, whose sympathies with Scotland, though living yet, though strong enough to make him ready to die for her,

still tend to absorb themselves, like a brook lost in a river, into his deeper sympathy with the Christian against the Infidel.

But here again, making all allowances, Scott's interest is excited by the unexpected defeat and slaughter, not by the victory, of the English. When their conquering shafts fell like rain upon Flodden, they had no special character, no separate individuality to the poet's eye. They remain an ordinary corps of the Southern army, a mere impersonal engine of destruction, in the hands of Surrey, against King James.

Putting aside 'The Lady of the Lake' for a moment, three other poems of importance were given to the world by Scott, in the following order : 'Rokeby,' 'The Bridal of Triermain,' 'The Lord of the Isles ;' of these three poems, 'Rokeby,' I think, possesses the least merit. For some unexplained reason, Scott did not lend himself to the metrical ebb and flow of his earlier epic ballads, but used the octo-syllabic measure in its dullest uniformity. The effect is unpleasing. Had 'Rokeby' been his first poem, men probably would not have remarked upon the stiffness of the rhythm in a very critical spirit. We should have been glad to take what we could get. As it is, however, we miss the alternation of longer and shorter lines, the varying cadences, of 'Marmion' and 'The Lay.' Hence we are accompanied throughout by a certain sense of disappointment, which chills our admiration of the finer parts of the poem.

In addition to this, the Tale is neither so skilfully constructed, nor so well told as usual.

For my part, I never was crammed in Modern History, and have picked up my knowledge thereof in a rambling sort of way. Hence I may be wrong, but I shall be surprised to learn that, even when the Puritan dominion was most oppressive and vexatious, it would have been in the power of Oswald Wycliffe—not one of Cromwell's major-generals, not holding any military command, not distinguished in any way over other wealthy adherents to the Parliament—to send suspected Cavaliers to the

scaffold, without trial, at his own will and pleasure; and yet this is the turning-point of the whole story. The diction also is unusually careless, even for Walter Scott.

At the same time, many of the characters are powerfully drawn, and the closing scene is impressively narrated; whilst many of the lyrics introduced are very beautiful.

Edmund's first song in 'Rokeby Castle'—'My harp alone'—is well worth noticing on account of its grace and sweetness—qualities which we prize the more in Scott, because, though quite within his reach whenever he chose to stretch out his hand, he did not often seek to obtain them.

Again, the dreadful legend of Wild Dayrell, with its dark background of ruffians, half seen through the gloom, haunts us like a picture by Rembrandt or Spagnoletto; and, besides its intrinsic merit, is brought in with wonderful dramatic effect.

There is, moreover, a little incident connected with 'Rokeby,' of which, if there are any aspiring young poets before me, it may be as well to remind them. Mr. Morritt, of Rokeby, observed that, whilst Scott was his guest, and already meditating upon his subject, that he noted carefully every minute peculiarity of the ground, every bush and wild flower native to the place. 'Surely,' said Morritt, 'you need not take all that trouble about such trifles.' 'Nay,' replied the true Poet; 'not so; every imagination has its limits, but Nature is inexhaustible; and, by watching her in all her moods—by taking, as it were, the silent advice, which she is always ready to give—you secure for your verses a truth and freshness, not the less felt, because the real cause of it may not always be exactly understood.'

'The Bridal of Triermain' was one of those mystifications, in which Scott, notwithstanding the general openness and frankness of his character, at all times took a strange pleasure.

It was published anonymously, together with two other

short poems, avowedly to imitate—one of them the manner of Crabbe ; the other, that of Moore ; whom in ‘The Bridal of Triermain’ Scott meant to emulate, is more doubtful. It now seems to be assumed that Scott wished to write a poem in his own style, with certain calculated differences, in the hope that the wise ones of Edinburgh might attribute it to his friend Erskine. But I think the better opinion is, that one of Coleridge’s imaginative poems was the model he had before him—for a moment at least. Such lines as—

And faintly gleamed each painted pane,  
In the lordly halls of Triermain,

and the like, sound like reminiscences of ‘Christabel ;’ of those ethereal melodies that steal upon us from the harp of Coleridge, like music softened by distance at night.

Scott, however, soon got tired of writing in fetters, and whenever a breath of battle comes across him, he relapses at once into his own natural manner.

The bursting crash of a foeman’s spear  
As it shiver’d against his mail,  
Made merrier music to his ear  
Than courtier’s whisper’d tale ;  
And the clash of Caliburn mire dear,  
When on a hostile casque it rung,  
• Than all the lays  
To their monarch’s praise,  
That the harpers of Reged sung.

This is Scott all over ; still something of the original scheme clings to the poem throughout ; the subject is more fanciful ; the machinery, to use that word in its technical sense, differs in kind from any employed elsewhere by Scott, and he seems to aim at greater delicacy and finish of style than he cared to work for when writing under his own name.

The result is, at any rate, a very beautiful and interesting fairy tale, which, when you have swept away some irrelevant rubbish about Lucy and her lover, introduced heaven knows

why, will compare favourably either with 'Rokeby' or 'The Lord of the Isles.'

This last poem may be dismissed in a few words, as a weaker 'Marmion'; it was probably written under some discouragement, arising out of a sense that the public favour was ebbing away from him, in consequence of the sudden popularity of Byron.

Splendid passages are to be found in it, and even if it contained nothing that was good, except the blessing of Bruce by the Abbot in the first canto, and the famous voyage-chant,

Merrily, merrily, bounds the barque;  
She bounds before the gale,

we could not be too grateful to the author; considering, however, the grandeur of the theme and the many glorious associations connected with the name of Bruce, it is hardly what we were entitled to expect from such a writer upon such a subject.

Of 'The Lady of the Lake' we may perhaps say, that if 'Marmion' be Scott's 'Iliad,' the 'Lady of the Lake' must rank as his 'Odyssey'; with less fire, it has more sweetness and grace, and by many persons is looked upon as the most perfect and artistically developed poem that he ever published. Ellen Douglas, with her high truth, high breeding, and lofty spirit—relieved as these more imposing attributes are by the touching simplicity and frank tenderness of a character without a stain upon it—without a tarnish from the rank breath of the world, is indeed a beautiful vision. She may well take her place by the side of Nausicaa in the old Greek fable, or of Miranda in the 'Tempest.'

In one respect there is more of 'Marmion' in 'The Lady of the Lake' than of 'The Iliad' in 'The Odyssey.' In 'The Odyssey' there is but little fighting, and that little is not dwelt upon with any great degree of genial enthusiasm; whereas in 'The Lady of the Lake, the Skirmish of Beal' an Duine,

though it wants the breadth and historical interest of the battle in 'Marmion,' is presented to us with hardly less force ; whilst the picturesque incident at the close of the contest, so vividly described by the Poet, gives this scene of war a character of its own.

Scott also tried his hand at the Drama, but he never gave his whole mind to it, except perhaps in the 'Ayrshire Tragedy.' This attempt of his has not, I think, received quite the attention it deserves. It failed, at any rate, to renew the interest of the public in Scott as a Poet, taking the word in its technical sense. Men would only attend to him from thenceforward as the author of 'Waverley.'

That Scott might have made himself a name among English tragedians is probable, not only because of this 'Ayrshire Tragedy,' but also from those endless fragments, full of power and spirit, improvised by him under the general name of Old Play, whenever he was at a loss for a motto wherewith to head some chapter in his novels. With those novels, however, that Old Play is so intimately connected, that I shall reserve what I have to say of it for some other opportunity.

I have now run hastily through the principal poems of Scott ; such poems at least as were written in verse. Other works of as great, or even greater importance, and quite as fully informed by the spirit of poetry, must, as I have just implied, remain for future consideration.

About the man himself, one thing may perhaps be added to what I said in the first lecture, namely, that Scott was essentially a bard, a born singer, a genuine descendant of the minstrels and rhapsodists of old. Unlike many cultivated authors, he was rather damaged than enriched, by not being a barbarian ignorant of books. Gifts of his, that, in our mere literary epoch, only served him well, in earlier times, and ruder states of society, would have been of absolutely priceless value. The Muses, we know, according to the old proverb, were the children

of Memory. But we hardly feel how true this was when first uttered, until we realise that where no writing exists, it is the bard who carries about, in his own breast, and that without appeal, the living history of his tribe and people. He is the depository of all their traditions ; his verses mark out for them territorial boundaries and hereditary claims. On all questions of genealogy, of origin, settlements, emigrations, alliances, and the like, he is the chief, if not the sole authority. Great need, therefore, lies upon him, to invoke and propitiate, by all the arts in his power, these coy daughters of Mnemosyne.

Even with us, a strong memory opens out wider regions for the imagination to soar over ; but in the old days, little indeed could be done without it. Now Scott, though not trained among rhapsodists, possessed, without any training, all their powers. As one of them, he would have accumulated, in a brain that never let anything go, such stores of the learning required by his art, as, when fused together with his ardent feelings and vivid historical imagination, must have raised him to an eminence, perhaps even greater than he has now attained. More especially, as when he recorded a glorious victory, or sorrowed over a noble death, he would have been allowed to pay honour to chiefs who led their clans to conquest, or fell, sword in hand, whilst protecting them, without having his songs interrupted and carped at by the Peace Preservation Society. The poet of battle fares ill in modern England. Successive governments seem equally ready—equally eager, I might almost say—to throw overboard all the treasures, all the heirlooms of our English past. We are to put off our whole armour, simply because it is armour, without much enquiring whether it be the armour of God or not. Such phrases as, fighting the good fight, quitting ourselves like men, holding fast the sword of the spirit—such appeals as that of Demosthenes to the immortal shadows that glorify Marathon—are now quite out of fashion.

Perhaps the most eloquent and impressive sentences heard

in this generation were those delivered by Mr. Bright against the Crimean War—I should rather say against all war, just or unjust, necessary or unnecessary, war sought at home, or war forced upon us from without.

'The angel of death,' he told his hearers, was passing continually between England and the East; he added, and the effect was very great: 'Even now I seem to hear the beating of his wings.' Yes! But alas, those wings beat ever by day and by night. The coal mine, and the overloaded ship, and the foul-smelling factory, and the fever-stricken suburb, and all the haunts of Mammon are darkened by their evil shadow as well as the battle-field. If Peace has her victories no less than War, Peace also has her defeats, more ignominious, more unredeemed by noble qualities, and not less cruel. And indeed, if the men who cheered that eloquent speech to 'the echo,' had studied their Homer as the earnest statesmen of England studied him long ago, it might have occurred to them that Sarpedon, in 'The Iliad,' had refuted Mr. Bright, by anticipation, three thousand years before Mr. Bright was born.

Sarpedon's argument is perfectly simple, and amounts to this. If you could secure everlasting life and unfading youth by fleeing from danger, it might be worth while to skulk at home, lapped in effeminate pleasures, and to leave the difficult path of honour to some one else; but since you may sacrifice your country, your friends, your self-respect, and yet fail in bribing fate to the extent of one additional hour, it is better to fulfil cheerfully the duties of your station, and die, if die you must, like a patriot and a king. I wish we had a Sarpedon or two in the House of Commons. I confess it makes my blood boil, when minister after minister gets up and boasts, on behalf of the English people, that nothing will ever make them submit to a conscription. As if it were a matter of pride that we, who claim to be the salt of the earth, should have been brought so low, by our superior freedom, civilisation, enlightenment, and all

that sort of thing, as to repudiate, on purely selfish grounds, the great primordial duty of mankind. Why is ‘l’homme qui se bat et conseille’ to shrink from *μάχη κυδιανείρη*—his business, when the due time for it comes and calls upon him? why is he to wrap himself up in cotton, whilst women go on facing the risk, which is their business, without complaint or hesitation? Is Mr. Bright prepared to enforce perpetual celibacy upon mankind because child-birth sometimes ends in death? He wishes, I suppose, our women to go on dying, if need be, for us, and so for their country; but when it comes to our laying down our lives for them, or for our country, which is the same thing in the long run, Mr. Bright, like Gyges in Herodotus, ‘prefers to survive.’ In spite, however, of all the Quakers that ever wore, or abandoned drab, this duty of not over-valuing life when honour calls upon us to risk it, will always be held paramount among duties by every clan, and tribe, and commonwealth, and nation, and empire that finds a home upon this earth. It has been so held since the days of Chedorlaomer and Sesostris, and will last on without any loss of strength, at any rate till the Millennium.

Well, all this, it may be said, is no business of mine. Still, as Poetry Professor, and without stepping away from my own proper province, I may at least affirm, not, I think, of the British people, but of those among us who cry peace when there is no peace—who will make no sacrifice either of time or wealth, or life, in order to defend and protect their native land—that they are not fit to be readers of Homer, or to take rank as fellow-countrymen with Scott.

## LECTURE VII.

## SHAKSPEARE.

'LEAR.'      'OTHELLO.'

AN Englishman, criticising Shakspere, is not unlikely to bring a hornet's nest about his ears. Our national poet is known, more or less, by every one, and yet those who can speak of him with full authority, so as to command assent, are still to seek. In Dr. Johnson's instructive but not very lively story, familiar to men, by name at least, as 'Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia,' the sage Imlac, a learned but, as you will remember, not an amusing person, enumerates the qualifications without which no one can claim to be a poet.

It takes so much time to reckon them all up, that the royal pupil, accustomed to his own way in the Happy Valley, and as impatient of *des longueurs* as the most vivacious Parisian extant, cuts him short with this natural interruption—'Enough, you have convinced me that it is impossible for any man to be a poet.'

This, however, does not suit Imlac's purpose, who begins again at once without mercy. 'To be a poet is indeed difficult, but not impossible.' Imlac's object is, unless my memory fails me, to insinuate that he himself might have been great in verse, if he had not preferred being greater still in philosophy; but I forget how the homily ends, nor is it of much importance. Taking the Abyssinian professor, however, as our

example, we may acknowledge that to be a complete, exhaustive, and infallible critic on Shakspere is nearly as difficult as to stand forth an accredited poet after the order of Imlac.

Of our great dramatist we may say, as I believe one of the Fathers said of the Bible: ‘There are to be found here bright shallows along which a lamb may wade, and dark places deep enough to drown an elephant.’ And, indeed, many illustrious elephants, German as well as English, whether drowned or not, have at least got out of their depth, and found their footing fail them, whilst splashing and trumpeting among our author’s plays. Still, however, acting in the spirit of Imlac, I would say this is no reason for abandoning in despair the task before us.

Any criticism upon Shakspere must be, at best, a criticism of contributions. A. may have a keener feeling as to one phase of his genius, and a deeper insight into its causes and consequences, than B. B., again, may be better worth listening to on other points than A. Thus a knowledge is gradually built up, by no means at one time, nor in exactly the same style, but like a cathedral, united together and mellowed down into one great whole—a whole not unworthy of the illustrious poet in whose honour it has been upreared. From this point of view I have undertaken to discuss some of Shakspere’s tragedies.

A field lies before me which, no doubt, has been reaped long ago, but it is so rich that gleaners can still go on, and find something left in it from generation to generation. The tragedies selected by me are, or rather were, ‘Lear,’ ‘Othello,’ ‘Hamlet,’<sup>1</sup> and ‘Macbeth.’ I believe that, in the general opinion, these tragedies stand out pre-eminently above the rest, so that none of the others, although many among them have singular and special merits of their own, attain unto the first four.

<sup>1</sup> Hamlet is one of the lectures which have disappeared.

Before, however, beginning an analysis of our four selected plays, I must make one or two qualifying remarks.

In the deeper and more austere tragedies, the play of complicated motives, that change and glance and recover their primitive colouring, as the circumstances change around them, is not what we have mainly to look for. As with the flickering of a shot-silk, or of a piece of Labrador spar, alternations of light and gradations of shadow are required, to do full justice to all the hidden elements of character.

Without, therefore, being absent in such tragedies, this particular dramatic excellence—I mean the complete analysis of character—is usually made subordinate to the great central passions of the play. The shifting gleams of common life, under which alone such delicate variations start out before our eyes, are swallowed up in the gathering darkness that runs onward before the earthquake and the hurricane. It is in the brilliant comedies, and in the tragedies of a less awful power, that characters are lingeringly dwelt upon, and painted with a loving minuteness of detail, setting the whole man or woman before us. We cannot have everything at once, images such as those of Miranda, Prospero, Caliban, Perdita, and Rosalind. Falstaff again, and all the quaint portraits belonging to the Falstaff gallery, rise up more naturally where the artist is working with a lighter hand, and less intent upon fathoming one form of passion, or one part of man's nature, to its lowest depths. Nor is it true of Shakspere alone. Oedipus and Medea are revealed to us but partially, and in connection with each terrible circumstance of their respective positions ; whilst Neoptolemus, in 'The Philoctetes'—according to our notions not a tragedy at all—charms us as the complete representation of chivalrous generosity, natural to a high-born youth, over whom ambition has less hold than a love of truth and a sense of honour. Mrs. Siddons, who certainly knew 'Macbeth' better than we do, is reported, when she was asked if she could

name a single virtue that the savage tyrant possessed, to have replied in her deepest tones : ‘At any rate, he was a good husband.’

This remark, though perhaps not a very wise one, illustrates sufficiently what I mean. There are endless aspects, whole sides of Macbeth’s character, of Lear’s, of Othello’s, left in shadow, designedly and necessarily so left ; whilst as to Portia, or Miranda, to Falconbridge, or Falstaff, we have absolutely nothing to learn.

We cannot, as I said just now, have everything at once ; and intensity of passion, the primal quality of a great tragic drama, must be bought, as a rule, by sacrificing, in some degree, variety and completeness of delineation.

There is one other subject as to which I wish to say a few words before embarking upon the separate plays.

I find, as I stated in my preface, that I recur to this point in the lecture on ‘Macbeth.’ A considerable time intervened between the delivery of the two lectures ; they were thus addressed to different audiences. It was not unnatural, therefore, that I should return to a subject, on which I entertain very strong and decided opinions, and I have not thought it necessary to cancel any part of either lecture in consequence.

I refer to those comic scenes occurring every now and then in the pauses even of the deepest tragedy.

It is rather the fashion at present to look askance at these interruptions, to pass lightly over them, as hardly worthy of Shakspere’s pen ; nay, at times to strike them out bodily, as not coming from Shakspere’s hand at all.

Great names, such as the name of Coleridge, are cited in support of this opinion. Now I may be wholly in error, but I promised to myself when I undertook my present office, that, whether right or wrong, I would always speak out exactly what I felt. Accordingly, no name however great shall hinder me from saying that I consider this opinion to be, in point of taste,

a pestilent heresy. Shakspere, doubtless, admonishes his fools not to speak anything but what is set down for them ; and here and there a joke or an expression, accepted as authentic, may have crept irregularly into the text ; however this may be, those intrusive speeches were, I apprehend, almost without exception the offspring of the moment, and as such were not ever written down. At any rate they do not, I am sure, afford the least justification for the erasure of whole scenes, because Coleridge, who had about as much sense of humour as the Monument on Fish Street Hill, did not approve of them.

To treat of this matter generally. The great tragic artists, who stand at the head of the great tragic schools, agree in this, as well they may, that the human mind cannot endure, for any great length of time, an extreme tension of the faculties without collapsing. Hence it was that the Greeks, by solemn choric songs, impassioned music, and majestic dancing, arrested for an instant the march of their tragedies, and gave the relief and repose that is needed. If the murderous jealousy of Medea had developed itself without pause or relaxation, if the terrible destiny that coils itself round Oedipus had kept tightening its grasp from first to last with monotonous intensity of pressure, the nerves of those who listened would have been overwrought then, as surely as our nerves would be overwrought now, if whole plays of Shakspere were made up of passages like the most tempestuous and heart-rending outbursts in ‘Othello’ and ‘Lear.’

Nay, even on the French stage, whenever the narrower limits and the more conventional treatment of human passion forced by circumstances upon France are transgressed, the great instincts of art act upon them as they acted upon the Greeks. The plot is retarded in ‘Esther,’ for instance, and in ‘Athalie,’ just as it would have been on the theatre at Athens by lyrical interludes, which enable the hearer to recover his overstrained powers and reinforce his exhausted attention.

'J'aime,' as Napoleon (of whom we may perhaps say, that if his generalship had been no better than his criticism, the history of Europe would have been altogether different) once observed to Goethe—'J'aime les styles tranchés.' That is, I apprehend, in tragedy continuous rant, stilted monotony, and the absence of all natural emotion. Shakspere, on the other hand, meant to teach us (not playing the tutor consciously of course) that whereas the more formal and pedantic tragedies stand apart from ordinary human interests, like cut flowers that have no connection with, or root in, our mother earth, the true heartfelt passions of mankind cannot detach themselves from her and live. He uses therefore necessary refreshments and slackenings in order to make us feel, that, in spite of the dark criminals working together in secret, in spite of the terrible catastrophes about to sweep away kingdoms and dynasties into utter ruin, human life in its vastness underlies these shallow irritations. That God, still as ever, causes his sun to shine and his rain to fall upon the unjust as well as the just, still guides our globe forward through space, bearing with it the innocent and the guilty, the happy and the miserable alike. Therefore Goneril's steward in 'Lear,' though charged by her with a message which is, as it were, the first throb of a realm-devouring earthquake, must still anxiously enquire, just like a steward in real life, where he is to put up his horses ; therefore the porter in 'Macbeth' is brought before us to explain, while the dark tragedy is burning within, how the compliment of a royal visit to his master has been appreciated in the servants' hall. Do those who condemn this scene ask us to believe that Shakspere would have jumped at once from the dialogues between Macbeth and his wife to an immediate discovery of the murder ; and if not, as everyone acquainted with Shakspere's manner will be ready to maintain, how is it that they propose to fill up the gap ? As a rule, I, belonging to the old school, am provoked rather than convinced when a German commentator blandly

informs me that I have been drinking, to borrow a sentence from De Quincey, not the fragrant wine the *μελιτήδεα οἶνον* of Homer, but the vapid swipes of some nameless rhapsodist. As for Homer, indeed, we have learnt at last that he never lived at any particular time, or in any particular place. That Solon, Pisistratus, Thucydides, and Aristotle knew nothing of their own national poet. But I did hope that this critical dry rot, eating away the life of great names, would be less mischievous among more modern writers. Not a bit of it. I turn to Pindar, and read in one of his Odes a sentence over which I hang in lingering admiration. It seems to me that it is one of the weightiest, one of the most brilliant gems to be found in that great poet, who is remarkable, perhaps beyond any other of the ancient singers, for the splendour of his exceptional passages :—

βῆμα δ' ἔργυμάτων χρονιώτερον βιοτεῖαι  
δ, τι κε σὺν Χαρίτων τύχῃ  
γλῶσσα φρενὸς ἐξέλοι βαθεῖας.

The adamantine compactness, the purity, and if I may use the expression, the matchlessly fine water, of this immortal phrase are such that it defies all translation ; its meaning, however, in the rough is something like this :—

The word all deeds shall over-live,  
That word to which the Graces give  
Their charm, with happy chance combined,  
Just as, through spirit-depths outflung,  
It rushes to the Poet's tongue  
Forth from the Poet's mind.

My German commentator, however, tells me without remorse, that this particular Ode was not written by Pindar at all, but by one of his anonymous imitators. Rebuked, and baffled once more, I fall back upon another poet whom I love, Theocritus—he, at least, in a regular literary age, with an established police force of literary criticism on foot, with libraries and librarians, and the multiplication of MSS. all round him—

must be safe from such amputations. Accordingly I read a passage, saying to myself : How characteristic of the author are these lines, in their intense picturesqueness. He is, unless I deceive myself, the most picturesque of all Greek writers, and this passage is perhaps his special achievement, as far as that one special excellence is concerned. It is too long to read in the original Greek, but this hasty translation of a part of it, may give you some faint idea of its character.

Hercules is describing, in his own person, one of his own renowned achievements—the death-grapple with the terrible Nemean lion. You must remember, however, that Theocritus, in his mere diction, is always exquisite ; that his words have a value of their own, and fit into their place as perfectly as gems and agates fit into an enamelled table, so that a translator is more baffled by him than by almost any other writer.

## His neck

Rose filled with lust of battle, and the hair  
 Of his red mane bristled in burning wrath,  
 Whilst his spine bent together, like a bow,  
 With huge frame drawn within itself, upon  
 The flanks behind ; as when some artisan,  
 A man well skilled in every form of work,  
 Is busy to compact a well-built car;  
 And warming first in fire, then forces down  
 Into a circle, fit for chariot wheels,  
 Wild fig-tree shoots that easily are cleft.  
 But, all at once, that slender fig-tree pole,  
 The hand that bent it overmastering,  
 Leaps with one bound to its full length afar,  
 So leapt the fierce beast, lengthening out, on me.

This is only one part of the description, which goes on with unabated vigour and picturesqueness. The translation has little merit, but I hope it may lead you to look at the original poem.

My German commentator, however, silences me in an instant. ‘ You do not know,’ says he, ‘ what you are talking about ; the writer of these lines is an impostor ; it comes from the pen

of Panyasis, or some such late epical writer, whose name (he is nothing but a name) you will doubtless find, if you choose to look for it, in the tenth book of Quintilian.' The learned Teuton is too heavy metal for me to encounter, therefore I submit in despair, and turn to Shakspere. But the representatives 'of slashing Wolfius with his desperate hook' are not to be daunted or turned aside from their prey, and the scythes of German criticism, I mean criticism in the spirit of the Germans, are even now setting our teeth on edge by being sharpened against him. On this head I can only say that whilst I am ready to listen to any sound reason for excluding lines or speeches, or even whole plays if you will, from a perfected edition, I object to the maiming of any poet, be he Homer, or Pindar, or Theocritus, or Shakspere, on arbitrary grounds, and in defiance of old traditions. Men hack at them, because perhaps they may have treated the same legend in two different ways, or otherwise rendered themselves obnoxious to vague conjectures, suggested, as it seems to me, by nothing better than individual caprice. With regard to Shakspere in particular, I would add that he was a playwright as well as a dramatic poet ; and that very often you are astonished how effective portions of a play become upon the stage which, as a reader, you had passed over with comparative indifference.

In 'Lear' the principal characters are Lear himself, Edmund, Kent, and Cordelia. This drama has the merit of a plot which develops itself naturally, and keeps increasing in interest to the end. In this respect it surpasses both 'Hamlet' and 'Macbeth.'

The plot of 'Hamlet' languishes and drags, whilst even in 'Macbeth,' the fifth act is of necessity (I am not blaming Shakspere for it) rather bustling stage business than transcendent poetry like the rest of the play.

As to Lear himself, we may remark that, though of an open, generous, and confiding temper, he is impatient of all control—

ready to discard his nearest and dearest friends, on slight provocation, with but little after-feeling, apparently, of their loss. Again, though capable of intense sympathy, he shows that he is so capable by sympathising, in the first instance at least, intensely with himself. Nor must we forget in forming our estimate of the character of his daughters, that what Goneril says of him is true:—‘You see how full of changes his age is ; the observation we have made of it hath not been little. *He always loved our sister most*, and with what poor judgment he hath now cast her off, appears too grossly.’ And again : ‘The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash,’ &c.

These peculiar conditions of a character naturally sympathetic, but narrowed down to sympathise mainly with itself, because all other men, were seen far below in the distance—from the isolation of a throne, are conceived and described by Shakspere as he only could conceive and describe them. His presentation of Lear reminds us of many court stories. We are reminded, for instance, of Miss Burney’s narrative of her sufferings under Queen Charlotte and Madam von Schwellenburg.

Queen Charlotte, though really a benevolent old woman, had grown to believe (one would almost say in harmony with some natural law) that, beneath the presence of Royalty, legs could never tire, nor backs ache, so that by withdrawing Miss Burney, as a reward for her literary talents, from that literary profession in which continued success was certain, in order to turn her into a very incompetent and ill-paid court menial, she had secured her happiness for ever. From her point of view, she had conferred upon the girl herself, and her whole family, such inestimable favours, that black ingratitude alone could account for Miss Burney’s even hesitating about the sacrifice of her health, her prospects, and possibly her life, to the maintenance of such a position. We may add, that our sense of Shakspere’s accuracy and depth of portraiture in this respect doubles for us the pathos of all those passages wherein

Lear, having broken through the benumbing atmosphere which environs kings, expresses his remorse for not having passed out of himself to think of the poor and needy. As for instance:—

I'll pray, and then I'll sleep.—

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,  
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,  
How shall your houseless heads, and unfed sides,  
Your looped and window'd raggedness, defend you  
From seasons such as this? *Oh, I have taken*  
*Too little care of this!* Take physic, pomp;  
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,  
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,  
And show the heavens more just.

In order to understand Lear's temper, and to explain why he has so little power to stand up against those fearful gusts of passion, tearing his heart to pieces and threatening, at intervals, to extinguish his reason, we must accept him, and study him as he is. He is presented to us as a king, whose gracious manners and generous impulses are coloured, if not created, by an intense desire to be loved for himself. It is no uncommon desire among persons highly placed, and it often poisons the life of men, who are forced into this ambition by having nothing else to wish for. They yearn for an assurance which few of them except perhaps the traditional Lord of Burleigh, can bring home to themselves, with absolute certainty.

Lear, indeed, as a popular monarch, worshipped and flattered for many years, seems nearly to have worked himself into the belief, that men invariably mean what they say; but the repressed doubt is unconquerable, and rises to the surface at last, leading him to impose upon his daughters a test that cannot be verified.

The high-spirited Cordelia, as we know, refuses to bind herself by idle words; and then the furious anger that springs up in his heart, on meeting with an amount of love short of adoration, gives to the audience a certain measure of his fretful self-esteem. Accordingly, when, in the after time, the veil

before his mind is rent in twain, and he sees Regan and Goneril as they are, the violence of the change is overwhelming, almost as overwhelming as that of the Sultan in the Eastern tale, who, at the bidding of a magician, plunges his head into a vessel of water. You remember what happened to him; how he straightway passed through a life of strange adventures, before he was withdrawn from the basin to find himself the same Sultan who took the dip some thirty seconds before. The prince in that case bought his knowledge, that time has only a relative existence, at a high price; whilst poor Lear gained a conviction that flattery is not truth, and that words do not always mean what they seem to imply, at a still higher.

His two odious daughters, Regan and Goneril, are not pourtrayed by Shakspere in his happiest manner. They serve their purpose, and that is all. As important elements in an important play, they are perhaps nearer lay figures, and conventional impersonations of stage wickedness, than any other characters in the whole compass of Shakspere's works. Everything spoken by Regan might belong to Goneril. Everything belonging to Goneril might come from Regan. There is no difference between them, unless we say that Goneril, as the elder vixen, and therefore separated from Cordelia by a wider interval, is the more enterprising and unscrupulous she-devil of the two.

It may also be suggested that the pregnant phrase—‘He always loved our sister best,’ carries with it some explanation of their conduct. The family nature was a hard nature. Lear's happiness does not, at first, seem to be impaired by the loss of Kent, or even of his favourite daughter; nay, there is a certain dryness and stoniness of fibre in Cordelia herself, coupled, moreover, with that specially unfeminine quality or non-quality, want of tact.

These are deficiencies which hinder us from believing that Shakspere intended Cordelia as a representative of the very highest class of women. She is pure, and true, and bold, but, though better than her sisters, she possibly would not have been

so very much better, if the finer elements within her had not been encouraged—if she had not bloomed and ripened under the sunshine of indulgence—if she had not, in plain English, been, what some people foolishly call, a spoilt child. This is plain English, no doubt, but it is also, I think, false English. We quote Solomon the infallible, when he says : ‘ Whoso spareth the rod, spoileth the child,’ just as if Rehoboam had been a great success. Just as if Solomon himself had occupied the position of a model European father ; whereas he was, in reality, much more like the master of a great public school, driven by circumstances over which he had no control, to enforce discipline among two or three hundred boys, of different ages, tempers, and capacities, living together under the same conditions, within certain limits, but otherwise only slightly connected with each other.

Now, from my point of view, though children ought to be indulged, they have a right to expect equality of indulgence. It is probably better to be austere with all than to make obvious favourites of any. But Lear, rashly open and self-confident, was not likely to do what he did by halves. So that Cordelia, whilst his favourite, was, I am sure, everything to him.

He may not have treated Regan and Goneril with palpable injustice, but would, nevertheless, make it universally felt and known how little he cared for them in comparison with his youthful darling. When a bitter jealousy had entered into their souls—a jealousy dangerous even to the gentlest nature, who can measure the effects produced upon such haughty and sullen spirits? All healthier impulses would be withered in the bud, as if beneath an unsparing north-east wind, until the whole character had sickened off into wintry barrenness—into blight, and cankers, and thorns.

That some such possibilities of mis-education were before Shakspere’s mind, whilst he was writing this play, is shown, I think, by the pains which he has taken with Edmund. Edmund

belongs to the same class of villains as Iago; the crime that suits their purposes is reconciled to their intellectual conscience (and they acknowledge no other) by a venomous discontent with life, and a bitter contempt for mankind ; they stand so far aloof from their fellow-creatures, that they feel no compunction in putting out of the way, to advance themselves, any number of human vermin—animals, in the eyes of unprejudiced philosophers such as they have become, of no higher value than so many rats or weasels.

Of Iago hereafter ; but what a flood of light is thrown upon Edmund's character in the very first scene of the play !

The brutal insolence of Gloucester, about his mother and himself, enables us to travel backwards in imagination, and to see, as it were, with our own eyes, how he was brought up in boyhood and in youth. The haughty Earl really loved and was proud of the promising lad, but from a sense of shame he disguises the extent of that affection under an appearance of half-angry contempt. Gloucester took care, we must presume, that Edmund had all the outward advantages, all the material comforts of high rank ; but to judge from his speech and manner, he must have flung these gifts at him, as if he were flinging bones to a dog. We can easily believe that the retainers of the Earl imitated their master's conduct as far as they dared, and were not slow to insult and slight his bastard son. A gentler spirit than his might have been crushed by such repeated affronts and mortifications ; but with him this was not likely to be the case. Vanity, when wounded and irritated, the most ruthless of all human passions, is, I think, the main-spring of his character, the source of all his vices, and the spur to all his ambitious hopes. Now this vanity of his, from the circumstances of his birth and position, was not so much wounded as chafed into one huge wound ; so that each of the inevitable rubs and disappointments that he encountered in life, kept inflaming an incurable sore and mixing up fresh poison with

his blood at every moment. Hence he grew up into implacable egoism, ready to deliver up an aged father to the tormentors, or to drive 'a brother noble' into exile, on the smallest prospect of advantage to himself ; nay, even without that prospect, the mere wicked delight of triumphing intellectually over those whom he betrays and hates, would of itself tempt him to any amount of crime. This ruling passion of his, according to the well-known adage, is strong in death. We see how when all his hopes are baffled, he dies fearlessly—nay, exultingly, because two royal ladies, upon whom he does not even bestow pity in return for their devoted affection, in seeking to win him, had thrown away their lives and their souls :—

Yet Edmund was beloved,  
The one the other poisoned for my sake,  
And after slew herself.

Nay, so completely for the moment is this savage passion satisfied and slaked, that his mind for once is open to a generous emotion. Because his dominant avidity has been fed up to fulness beyond all expectation, he passes out of himself and endeavours to save Lear and Cordelia.

Kent belongs to a type of character much in favour with Shakspere—the honest, bold humourist. Upon such a man's fidelity and loyal affection you may rely. But his sense of honour and duty is, nevertheless, helped by his originality, by his somewhat scornful independence of mind. He values the goods of this world according to an estimate of his own ; and always acts nobly, partly, no doubt, because his temper is a noble one, but partly, also, because it amuses him to indulge a quietly sarcastic contempt for the meanness and weakness which he sees everywhere around him. He is unambitious, because he cannot play the game of ambition without surrendering some portion of his intense personality—an idea not to be entertained in the presence of such ridiculous temptations as human life affords.

These are the central characters upon whom the storm of the tragedy beats ; around whom its angry lightnings fall.

Of that tragedy I need not give, I am sure, any detailed account. We all know with what art the double plot is arranged, and how skilfully the events of that double plot are made to dovetail into each other, when Lear and Gloucester severally fall into the pits dug for them by their unnatural children.

Nor can it be necessary to tell you how the elements, though Lear ‘had never given them kingdoms, nor called them children,’

As servile ministers,  
Did yet with two pernicious daughters join  
Their high-engendered battles ‘gainst a head,  
So old and white as his.

Nor yet how the terrible storm, convulsing nature, harmonises with the inward tempest that is tearing to pieces the heart and intellect of the afflicted King.

None can fail to see what wonderful force these outward coincidences and sympathies lend to every outburst of passion and despair, and how all this helps to make those scenes in which the reason of Lear is torn away in fragments, as planks are torn away from under a broken ship, sublimer than anything in Æschylus or Milton ; sublimer, perhaps, in the strictest sense of the word, than anything to be found elsewhere in Shakspere himself.

In contrasting Gloucester and Lear, we may observe that whilst Regan and Goneril are coarse flatterers, whose excessive professions would have disgusted anybody, unless his relish for adulation had, to use Goldsmith’s phrase, ‘grown callous almost to disease,’ the art of Edmund is devilish and supreme. The bold cynicism of wickedness which prompts him to tell his father the naked truth, in order to deceive ; and to put into the mouth of Edgar an exact description of his own schemes, so that if imputed to him, the imputation may not be believed ; and again, the easy power wherewith he keeps his father and

brother apart, show us how formidable his nature is. Catiline or Borgia could hardly have trod, with more certainty and self-confidence, the difficult path of treason.

## EDMUND.

I hope, for my brother's justification, he wrote this but as an essay or taste of my virtue.

This policy, and reverence of age, makes the world bitter to the best of our times.

Come to me, that of this I may speak more. If our father would sleep till I wake him, you should enjoy half his revenue for ever, and live the beloved of your brother, Edgar.

We cannot wonder that Gloucester is like wax in the hand of this able intriguer, and that he should exclaim, 'Oh strange and fastened villain, would he deny his letter:' nor is the profound skill of the poet less conspicuous in the retribution that overtakes this Edmund and the vile women whom he uses as his tools. They are 'bold, bloody, and resolute'—far too strong and able for the weaker virtue that opposes them. But still punishment overtakes them in the most natural way. It is when all their plans are triumphant, when all resistance is beaten down, and their fortunes, to use the expression of the Psalmist, are 'flourishing like a green bay tree,' that their own vices become fatal to them.

The evil affinity between evil souls drew the three wicked natures mysteriously together, and the result is ruin to all of them. We feel when the tragedy ends that God is just, crushing in his anger those who have broken through the holiest ties of nature, when prompted to do so by avarice and ambition; and with his utmost gentleness dismissing Lear, in spite of his weaknesses every inch a king, to the gracious and healing rest of death.

Vex not his ghost : oh let him pass ! he hates him  
That would upon the rack of this tough world  
Stretch him out longer.

It is almost impertinent in me to point out the beauty of

this speech, or of others like it, in what may be called the minor key of passion. Who needs to have such passages recalled to him as—

Pray do not mock me:  
I am a very foolish fond old man,  
Four-score and upwards,—not an hour more nor less;  
And, to deal plainly,  
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.  
Methinks I should know you, and know this man;  
Yet I am doubtful, for I am mainly ignorant  
What place this is; and all the skill I have  
Remembers not these garments ; nor I know not  
Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me,  
For, as I am a man, I think this lady  
To be my child Cordelia.

CORDELIA.

And so I am—I am.

This desire to close their great and passionate creations with a soothing and harmonising modulation, with a placid glory of sunset light, freed, as it were, from the oppression of heat, is often observable in the highest poets. We have it before us here, we have it in the ‘Œdipus Coloneus’ of Sophocles ; and as an instance of its most perfect expression I need only turn to the last book of ‘The Iliad,’ where Achilles, no longer breathing pestilence and death, like the baleful star Sirius, manifests to the aged Priam how gracious and noble his character naturally is. Or again, I might refer you to the gentle pastoral ending of the Book of Job, where we finally take leave of the venerable Patriarch, who has been buffeted by the malice of Satan, who has wrestled, we might almost say, in the agony of his spirit on equal terms with God ; we leave him, as you all recollect, listening to the joyous laughter of sons and daughters on the air around him ; to the lowing of thousands of oxen, and to the tinkling of innumerable sheep-bells, under the star-revealing skies of his happy Arabia.

In moving on from ‘Lear’ to ‘Othello,’ we leave behind us a tragedy, thought by many to be absolutely the highest produc-

tion of Shakspere ; and pass to one in my judgment still higher. The end of ‘Othello’ is above all praise, above everything but wonder and reverence. It has, moreover, this advantage over the play just spoken about, that we can enter more perfectly into the feelings of the sufferers, and surrender ourselves to the natural emotion thence arising, without hesitation or doubt. We are not dealing with kings and princesses, but with men and women like ourselves. There is a lost drama of Euripides, ‘The Merope,’ characterised by Aristotle as the most tragic of all the dramas belonging to the Athenian stage ; what he means by most tragic, though open to some doubt, amounts, I presume, to this : that though inferior to the noblest productions of Æschylus in austere grandeur, inferior also to the completest works of Sophocles in art, finish, and harmony, it yet awakened in the human heart, more vividly than anything found elsewhere, the emotions of pity and terror ; and upon these emotions, according to him, as upon her necessary foundations, tragedy is built.

If Aristotle were alive now, he would say, I believe, that ‘Othello,’ of all the plays of Shakspere, corresponded most nearly with this lost ‘Merope’ of Euripides. Lear, but for his broken heart, would have been not much better than an ordinary self-complacent king, one of those rulers over whose death or accession the cry is raised, without special grief or special enthusiasm, ‘Le roi est mort, vive le roi.’ Cordelia, as I have said before, though honest and true, is somewhat hard and unfeminine, so that it is rather the terrible pressure of destiny upon these characters than anything in the characters themselves, that awakens our interest and compassion.

With Othello this is not so. There surely never was a happier dramatic juxtaposition than that of the simple-souled African, preserving, under all his acquired talents for war and statecraft, the untutored heart of one fresh from the mint of nature ; and of Desdemona keeping alive, through all the

licentious refinements of Venetian civilisation, a purity and tenderness worthy of the first woman.

Both of them, therefore, are open beyond all others to the influence of intrigue, and are, so to speak, the natural prey of unscrupulous schemers, like Iago.

We see that Othello, by reason of his merits—by reason of the clearness and nobleness of his character, is a necessary victim. As, in spite of all his strength and royal qualities, he cannot escape from the toils, we never lose our sympathy with him. Whilst as to Desdemona, ‘the gentle lady married to the Moor,’ it is surely needless to speak of her.

Iago, one of the most famous and effective characters in Shakspere, is also one of the most puzzling. The risk he runs, and the odium he incurs for objects seemingly inadequate, perplex the reader. Having acquired a reputation for honesty by his bluntness and bold indifference to public opinion, trusted by his superiors as a valuable officer, and sure to rise in his profession, if not as quickly as he expected, at least without any serious interruption to his hopes, it is difficult to explain the bitterness and rashness of his conduct. I have no better solution at hand than the one already presented to you in the case of Edmund. Shakspere meant, I think, to show how implacably wicked a man can become under the stings of wounded vanity and baffled intellectual pride.

Mankind has not done him justice, and therefore he holds that mankind is deserving of punishment in return. Injuries, fancied injuries, perhaps, have created and fed a hidden sore within him, that has gnawed away his envious and discontented youth. It is, therefore, not only that he wishes to make sport and profit out of his fellow-creatures, but every stab that he inflicts upon them is, in his eyes, a legitimate retaliation. If this impulse of vanity, joined, as it is, with a sense of venomous intellectual triumph over his hated dupes, be not enough to explain his actions, I must leave the explanation to some critic more subtle

than myself. That wounded vanity is the predominant passion in Iago's mind, we may gather, I think, from his first introduction to us. For it is obvious that if we take into consideration his character, his age (only twenty-eight), and his prospects, we need some stronger incentive than a temporary disappointment, or a vague jealousy, to account for the recklessness with which he encounters the risk of absolute ruin.

If then, this wounded vanity be not accepted as the cause of his crimes, I, at least, cannot find another. We must remember that up to the very verge of the catastrophe, all men trust him wholly ; he is ‘honest Iago’ throughout. Othello first mentions him in these words :—

Please your Grace, my ancient;  
A man he is of *honesty* and trust:  
To his conveyance I assign my wife.

Cassio relies upon him with equal confidence. Desdemona, on hearing his name, at once exclaims : ‘Oh, that’s an honest fellow,’ and in her earliest agony of doubt and terror, what immediately suggests itself to her mind is to seek his advice.

Prithee, to-night  
Lay on my bed my wedding sheets—remember—  
And call *thy husband* hither.

Yet in the opening of the play he unbosoms himself to Roderigo, and actually boasts of being the unscrupulous self-seeker that we find him at the end.

For when my outward action doth demonstrate  
The native act and figure of my heart,  
In compliment externe, ‘tis not long after  
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve,  
For daws to peck at. I am not what I am.

He knows that such a snipe, as he calls Roderigo, oppressed, moreover, with guilty secrets and guilty hopes of his own, is not dangerous; that even if the profligate youth were to turn upon him, he is too firmly rooted in the general esteem to be

shaken by so weak a hand ; so secure does he feel, that he indulges himself in the rare pleasure of taking off his mask, and giving his inmost thoughts a moment's liberty and air. From these inmost thoughts we see that it is not so much the loss of promotion, a loss to be repaired hereafter, as the slight put upon him by preferring Cassio, an irreparable mortification, that cuts him to the heart.

Mere prattle, without practice,  
Is all his soldiership. But he, sir, had th' election ;  
And I—of whom his eyes had seen the proof  
At Rhodes, at Cyprus, and on other grounds,  
Christian and heathen—must be he-leed and calmed—  
By debtor and creditor ; this counter-caster ;  
He, in good time, must his lieutenant be,  
And I (God bless the mark !) his Moorship's ancient.

Again, when to extinguish, I suppose, for good and all, some flickerings of remorse, he finds it necessary to strengthen his evil impulses by conjuring up a belief that Othello has intrigued with his wife; it is not the actual fact that he cares for, since he looks upon Emilia with but little affection. What falls from him is this, ‘so is it thought abroad’—To imagine himself the object of such a suspicion, though he has nothing but his own wicked fancy to go upon,

Doth like a poisonous mineral gnaw his inwards.

Irritable vanity, therefore, coupled with a cold intellectual delight in playing upon the feelings of other men, furnishes us with a key to his conduct. Moreover, a high opinion of his own powers, and a bitter contempt for all the rest of mankind, lead him to believe that he will emerge victorious from his complicated and perilous game. Emerge from it, refreshed by a pleasurable sense of triumph in his own superior ingenuity ; of scornful joy, at the folly of those whom he has succeeded in betraying.

To any readers unsatisfied with this explanation, the almost

certain ruin to which this cynical man of the world, ‘who knows all qualities with a learned spirit of human dealings,’ exposes himself for very inadequate reasons, must remain the one element in this glorious tragedy open to criticism. But if a sufficient cause for Iago’s plottings be once granted, it is impossible to conceive anything more perfect than they are in point of execution. No high-bred Italian artist from the school of Borgia, who has decided that any hurrying towards the goal misbecomes a true politician, and that revenge is a more exquisite ragout when eaten cold than when eaten hot, can surpass this ‘ancient of exceeding honesty’ in malicious forethought, patience, and skill.

As for his wife, he trusted, I suppose, that he could terrify her into silence; at the worst he was ready, as the event proves, to silence her in one way or another; but with Emilia, as with the Moor, his learned knowledge of human nature failed him a little. He had studied Italians mostly, and now discovers that his inferences do not altogether hold good for Africa. He did not expect Desdemona to be killed quite so soon. The barbaric suddenness of Othello took him therefore by surprise. At the most critical period of his enterprise, he is placed in the position of a chemist who, having calculated on an explosion according to the strength of gunpowder, finds too late that he is dealing with nitrate of silver or gun cotton. Moreover, though he may have known men thoroughly, his knowledge of women is less accurate; his cold-blooded selfishness blinded him to this great truth, that women, even timid and frivolous women, are often visited by a breath of noble emotion, not to be measured or gauged beforehand; that they are often lifted up, under the influence of some generous passion, to a height of daring and self-devotion—careless of consequences, reached but seldom even by the bravest of men. Shakspere undoubtedly meant to tell us that Emilia, in her ordinary life, was afraid of Iago. There are speeches of hers full of latent bitter-

ness against the husband, whom yet, as we see, she will not openly provoke ; Speeches hinting at an estimate of his character very different from the prevailing one. *She* never says anything about his honesty, nor lends any confirmation to what is said of it by others. She is coarse-minded, no doubt, with a certain *ton de garnison*, as the French say, about her ; but there is one bright spot in her character, and that is a disinterested affection for her angelic mistress. When Desdemona is dead, all fears for herself, all thoughts of herself, die also. All care for her husband's fortune, her husband's character, for her own life, are swallowed up in the one overmastering passion of horror and despair. It is to be observed further, that this is the only place in the tragedy where Iago loses command over himself. He thought that his wife, either through love or fear, would stand by him, and so perhaps she would have done, if time had been given to her; but the first irresistible impulse of generous womanly anger had not entered into his calculations. Then it was that the iron temper, strong enough beforehand, and strong enough afterwards, to face the rack and the scaffold in self-controlling silence, broke down for a moment under this unlooked-for disappointment.

It is necessary also to remark, in extenuation of Othello's violence, that Desdemona has come within the grasp, has subjected herself to the unflinching laws of tragedy, by not speaking the truth about her handkerchief at the critical moment ; she is guilty of what easy-going moralists call a white lie, perhaps it is hardly as much as a white lie; hoping to find the handkerchief immediately, she might excusably consider it as mislaid for a moment, rather than lost ; this mistake, however, of hers links itself into the fatal chain of destiny—a chain that had begun to coil itself around her, when Brabantio whispered his bitter hint :—

Look to her, Moor, have a quick eye to see:  
She has deceived her father, and may thee.

This momentary tampering with truth gives Iago an extra power and purchase to bind her fast in his net. I need not say how skilfully Shakspere paves the way to this venial error, and prepares our minds for its terrible results. Desdemona is naturally of an open and confiding temper; her frankness, indeed, at first nearly baffled Iago's insinuations; but this frankness arises, not so much from a high spirit, as from having been always loved and indulged. Against unlooked-for severity she is rather a coward.

That blundering old Brabantio, who describes her as 'a maiden never bold,' 'of spirit so still and quiet that her motion blushed at itself,' drew, no doubt, from his insight into these qualities, a wrong inference. He failed to discern that it was this special womanliness—this vine-like habit of clinging to others, which dissatisfied her with 'the wealthy curled darlings of her nation.' She turns accordingly from them, to recognise instinctively, 'as the natural male of her species,' as the true complement to her own gentle and feminine nature, that dauntless warrior who stood unmoved at the cannon,

When it had blown whole ranks into the air,  
And like the devil, from his very arm  
Puffed his own brother.

But though Brabantio reasons ill from what he knew of her character, he sets that character distinctly before us; thence we see how it came to pass that she was startled out of her usual sincerity, and shrank into herself, like a sensitive plant, at the first approach of Othello's anger.

In this sort of lecture, tied to time, and delivered to fluctuating audiences, the lecturer can hardly do more than give hints, and scatter his impressions broadcast, in the hope that some seed of thought or feeling may take root in a congenial soil, and bear fruit in due season. I shall not, therefore, apologise—the clock apologises for me—if I proceed at once to a conclusion. Now, in summing up, I think 'Othello' may fairly

claim to be the greatest achievement of Shakspere, as a playwright. A mere playwright, however, as such, ranks below the true dramatist. He never reaches, does not, I suppose, aim at reaching, the kind of reputation attained to by Sophocles and Shakspere, as poets of all time. We may add that though Shakspere, as he has shown in 'Lear,' 'Othello,' and elsewhere, possesses this power, he often neglects to use it. In point of fact, as to this department of his art, he is by no means the supreme artist. He must yield, I presume, the first place to Calderon or Lopé de Vega. Still, however, a happy conception and development of the plot, a careful arrangement of the incidents, and a well considered advance to the catastrophe ;—all these things, though they may perhaps display dexterity of intellect and fertility of resource rather than absolute genius, nevertheless enhance very greatly any powers of passion and true poetry which may belong to the writer.

If, therefore, a critic were influenced by a combination of excellences differing in kind, such as 'Othello' presents—by the skill and strength of intellect shown in framing and pressing forward the story, as well as by the intense passion and noble poetry pervading the whole drama—influenced, I mean, so much as to call it the master-piece of Shakspere, I have little objection to make ; it is rather a matter of feeling and individual taste than of definite criticism. I myself consider that 'Macbeth' soars into a higher region of the imagination, and dives lower down into the deep places of the human soul, than any other human composition—except perhaps the Book of Job. I consider, also, that 'Hamlet' is richer in thought, in meditative feeling, in the union of high poetry with high philosophy, than 'Othello,' or any other drama in existence. Still, if any one meets me thus, What you say of 'Macbeth' is true ; what you say of 'Hamlet' is true ; but we are talking of tragedies, and 'Othello,' according to Aristotle's canon of pity and terror, is a more perfect tragedy than either ; I do not think I could

encounter him with a direct contradiction. The rapid onset of events, as they push each other forward like huge sea waves, irresistible and unturnable as fate itself, beats the breath out of one's body and the ground from beneath one's feet, whilst the terrible pathos of the scenes, ending with the murder of Desdemona, was too much for Samuel Johnson himself. Little indulgent as the tough old moralist was to irregular emotions and wild impulses of undisciplined feeling, he gave way, nevertheless, beneath the piteous fate of the loving Venetian girl, and sympathised with the remorse of the self-condemned Moor so keenly as to say, 'I rejoice that I have finished my annotations, that I may escape from these dreadful and heartrending scenes.' Then comes the close. The intrigues of Iago have brought about all, more than all, the mischief he intended. We look forward in vain, and can anticipate for Othello no escape from despair, except through a commonplace and vulgar suicide.

This we feel, we cannot but feel, is an inadequate and unsatisfying catastrophe—a catastrophe unworthy of all that has gone before—unworthy of the noble, though misguided, heart that has wandered astray into darkness and the shadow of death. Happily for mankind, Shakspere felt this also, and bent his mighty genius to the task of reconciling our minds to the last appearance before us of his unhappy Moor. There is nothing in any drama that surpasses—nay, if we consider them as uniting poetry, passion, technical skill, and knowledge of stage effect, I would almost say there is nothing that equals—these last speeches of Othello.

The judges are listening with grave sympathy to a seeming defence: but just when their hearts are softened within them; just when the culprit has made them feel how loyal and faithful a servant he has ever been to his employers; how, if passionate and impetuous, his passion and impetuosity were never uncontrollable, except when insults and injuries were aimed at Venetians or at Venice; then by a sudden turn, wonderful as a piece of theatrical art, he shows to the

world, that though others are ready to pardon him, he cannot accept forgiveness ; and thus forces us to acknowledge that life having become impossible, he does not so much commit suicide as take the law into his own hands ; He creates in his own breast a tribunal without appeal ; and inflicts a retribution upon himself, after it has been decreed by himself, as a just though inexorable judge.

## LECTURE VIII.

'MACBETH.'

ANY approach to creations, whether human or divine, that stand alone in their excellence, is accompanied by a very peculiar emotion.

The Falls of Niagara, the sublimest peak of the Himalayas, the 'Principia' of Newton, the tragedy of 'Macbeth'—if, as I believe, that tragedy be the chief expression of Shakspere's dramatic genius—alien from each other as they may be, are all alike in this ; That the cataract next in majesty, the mountain second as to height, the science by ever so little shallower, the tragedy only a shade less powerful, are separated, each of them, from its one superior by a gulf of thought, and seem to differ in kind rather than in degree ; We feel that in the one case the Hand of God, and in the other the soul of man, has done its best for us ; That anything materially greater must be looked for in worlds of a type nobler than ours—anything intellectually greater among natures raised above ourselves in the scale of Being.

Nor do I think that anyone, though he might prefer 'Hamlet' or 'Othello' to 'Macbeth'—though he might perhaps find in unexplored African recesses a precipice more awful or a waterfall mightier than those hitherto known—would deny the general truth of the above statement; would deny, I mean, that the sense of finding ourselves in communion with whatever is greatest and highest of its kind, does exercise upon us a

special influence, easy to be recognised, though difficult to analyse or to name. It is in this spirit, a spirit of reverence and silent admiration, that I always have drawn near to the play of 'Macbeth.' My sense of attraction towards its beauty, of subjugation under its power, run together into a third feeling, compounded of, yet distinct from both, and I seem to hear a voice calling out to me that it is holy ground I am standing upon.

I was therefore both surprised and shocked to discover that two able critics—Mr. G. W. Clark, and Mr. Wright—raise the question, raise it too with the easiest placidity, as if it were wholly unimportant to us, whether some other writer besides Shakspere may not have had a hand in the composition of this matchless drama. Their first theory is that Shakspere divided the labour with Middleton or someone else. And they state, as an example, how Shakspere assisted Fletcher in the composition of the 'Two Noble Kinsmen.' This, they observe, is generally admitted. No doubt it is generally admitted, and for this excellent reason, that on the title-page of the 'Two Noble Kinsmen' we find it plainly declared to be the production 'of those two eminent hands, Mr. John Fletcher and Mr. William Shakspere.' The argument, therefore, from the 'Two Noble Kinsmen,' rightly considered, tells the other way. A similar partnership being assumed for 'Macbeth,' we are entitled to ask for a similar declaration; Let Mr. Clark and Mr. Wright produce one, and we will listen to their pleadings; Till then, as far as the precedent of the 'Two Noble Kinsmen' is concerned, they are out of court.

These gentlemen then go on to tell us how Mr. Spedding has shown conclusively, as they think, that Fletcher assisted Shakspere in the composition of 'Henry VIII.' This is quite another matter. I have heard, if I am not mistaken, that Mr. Tennyson, as great a master of poetical criticism as of poetry itself, has at times pronounced an opinion that 'Henry VIII.' was written entirely by Fletcher, and that Shakspere had nothing

to do with it. There is, however, so far as I know, no stage tradition to that effect—no reason why Fletcher, then at the height of his popularity, should not have claimed the play if it were his. This judgment, therefore, a conversational judgment, held with I know not what consistency and firmness, rests altogether I presume, upon internal evidence and on comparison of styles. Now I own frankly that my experience of life, my reading, such as it is, and my orthodox disbelief in Papal, or Quasi-Papal infallibility, all tend to shake the faith which I might otherwise have put in these delicate and elastic methods of reasoning.

I recollect the noble metaphor of Longinus, when he brushes away the subtleties of the separatists by comparing ‘*The Iliad*’ to a meridian, ‘*The Odyssey*’ to a setting sun. Whether he is absolutely right in the particular instance is perhaps hard to say; but the spirit of this criticism I accept as true and sound. A great poet, in the morning and noon of his genius, naturally thinks more of light and heat and strength; in its evening, of beauty and colour and grace. If this be so, then, whilst he is rejoicing as a giant to run his course, by parity of reasoning every movement must be a gradation, every process a variation of aspect, every instant must bring a change. Taking such changes as certain to occur; With regard to ‘*Henry VIII.*,’ the author is writing of men almost, if not altogether, his contemporaries. He might well desire to shed over the play some tinge of common life, and might make his verses looser and more conversational of set purpose, in order that they should appear easier and more natural to the audience. Why, even of Mr. Tennyson himself, we may predict without unreasonable boldness, that about the year of Our Lord 2600, some heir-general or surviving executor of German criticism will pronounce authoritatively, once for all, that the system of blank verse in the later idylls is so different from the system of the first (perhaps I should now call it the last) as to render

it impossible for a capable scholar to accept them as the work of the same hand.

This being so, even if I were compelled to admit that in ‘Henry VIII.’ the manner of expression and the modulations of the verse belong apparently to Fletcher rather than to Shakspere, I should not, therefore, decide at once, in defiance of all tradition, that Fletcher, instead of Shakspere, must be credited with the authorship.

We know that for a time, for a good number of years indeed, Fletcher was a greater favourite with the public than his illustrious contemporary.

Is it not then possible that Shakspere, buoyed up as he must have been by a half-indignant and half-humorous sense of his own immeasurable superiority, may on some particular occasion have said to himself, ‘The groundlings prefer Fletcher do they? then Fletcher they shall have; This is just the play, bringing as it does upon the stage before us, those whom many still living have seen and known in the flesh, to make use of his lax, fluent, and conversational metre.’

From my point of view, in order to say positively that such a man must have written this, or could not possibly write that, all the complicated threads of motive and impulse, all the fluctuating circumstances and inmost secrets of a vanished life, all the roots of human character, should be laid bare. We cannot tell how it is that many great men should, on particular occasions, have fallen below themselves; How, on the other hand, smaller men should rise, as they often do for a moment, far above themselves; *We* cannot explain the matter, I have said, at least I cannot; and therefore on such occasions I think more of external and traditional evidence, and less of unerring consciousness and judicial intuition, than many abler critics.

Even the most original men are not always displaying a peculiar colour of thought and style: There must be some neutral tints, some passages that would not be out of place in

the works of more than one : Indeed, I think it probable that these gentlemen, Messrs. Clark and Wright, would not have been so eager, like Bacchus in ‘The Frogs,’ to weigh single lines and short phrases in their balance, had it not been for Middleton’s play of ‘The Witch.’ There is, no doubt, a certain likeness between the witches of the two dramas, and Stevens maintained that Shakspere had copied from Middleton.

This theory, however, with a view of showing that Middleton was the interpolator of, or the partner in, ‘Macbeth’ (I wish these two very different suggestions were kept properly distinct), is summarily dismissed by Messrs. Clark and Wright. We are told : ‘Given two works, one of transcendent merit and one much inferior, it is much more probable that the latter should be plagiarised from the former—if plagiarism there be—than the former from the latter.’ Indeed ! I am not so sure of that. Power of any kind has a most lordly idea of its own rights and privileges. It is not the fish-hawk that plagiarises from the eagle, but the eagle from the fish-hawk—not the ignorant savage, but his civilised and Christian neighbour, who seizes upon hunting-ground after hunting-ground because the rightful owners cannot turn them to the best account : And, as we all know, the man who sat upon a dunghill raking it for pearls was not Ennius but Virgil.

Putting aside this question for the moment, the lines and passages cited by the two editors as spurious are after all so few and unimportant that to regard them as assigned, in an avowed partnership, to a regular associate seems an incredible supposition.

Their other theory, that the play was interpolated after Shakspere’s death or retirement from the stage is more probable ; and if they mean no more than this, that a song or two may have crept into the text, or that some stage business put at the end was made more bustling and noisily effective—such a possibility is hardly worth contesting, though also it is hardly worth noticing.

It may, however, be as well to come to particulars. Messrs. Clark and Wright contend that the second scene of the first act was not written by Shakspere : that scene, as we all know, opens with Duncan's question, 'What bloody man is that ?'

I must confess to a prejudice in favour of this paragraph, not strictly legitimate. All barristers of thirty years' standing, who used, in times gone by, to roar over a whimsical book called 'Arabiniana,' or the sayings and doings of an eccentric Serjeant Arabin, would regret to learn that the motto of that undying work was derived, not from Shakspere, but from some inferior poet ; the motto in question was, I need hardly say, 'What bloody man is that ?—that is the serjeant.'

Overstepping, however, this prejudice of my youth, what strikes me in this impeached scene is, first, that the text appears to be slovenly and corrupt, so as greatly to require correction and readjustment.

Secondly, although maimed in point of style, it is finely conceived from a dramatic point of view, and useful in introducing us to the plot.

Thirdly, that though, as it now stands, it may be somewhat clumsy and confused, it nevertheless contains passages which I must insist on attributing to Shakspere himself. Take for instance the lines describing the aspect of the battle—

Doubtfully it stood,  
Like two spent swimmers that do cling together,  
*And choke their art.*

That, upon my ear, rings like Shakspere all over.

As to their final reason against the authenticity of this scene—that Shakspere's good sense would hardly have tolerated the absurdity of sending a severely wounded soldier to carry the news of a victory. Nothing, I think, but the consciousness of a weak case could have induced such able critics to press so lame an argument into their service.

In the first place, there is no evidence that the sergeant was

carrying despatches at all ; he is encountered, on his road to a surgeon, by the King and his courtiers, as they are moving down towards the field of battle ; and they naturally give him due honour, after stopping to ask what is about to happen, or has happened. But secondly, supposing he were the carrier of despatches, how does this impugn Shakspere's or anybody else's good sense ? Why, the faithful messenger, who expires with the cry of victory on his lips, is one of the commonplaces of Poetry—nay, why do I speak only of Poetry ; History herself abounds with instances of a like kind.

Surely, about the very battle of battles, when the men of Marathon,<sup>1</sup> fighting for their country, saved, without knowing it, the inheritance of the whole human race, there arose some such legend. Surely, unless my memory deceives me, we learn that he who bore the immortal tidings home to Athens rushed in, covered with dust and blood, to fall down and die whilst telling his story—to die whilst, with his latest breath, he called upon his fellow-citizens to rejoice with him. This legend may be true, or it may be false, but the solemn poetical instinct of the Greeks decreed that destinies like his must be consecrated, as it were, by the lightning stroke—That to carry such a message was like touching the Ark of God—a greater thing than any man could accomplish and live.<sup>2</sup>

Again, if Marathon and Morat seem to be too far off, we can summon Mr. Browning into court for the defence.<sup>3</sup> As to the

<sup>1</sup> The same story is told in almost identical terms of the battle of Morat.

<sup>2</sup> The above paragraph was suggested by, and partly borrowed from, a fine passage in Archer Butler's ' Platonic Dialogues.'

<sup>3</sup> Then off there flung in smiling joy,  
And held himself erect  
By just his horse's mane, a boy :  
You hardly could suspect—  
(So tight he kept his lips compressed  
Scarce any blood came through),  
You looked twice e'er you saw his heart  
Was all but shot in two.

general style of the sergeant's declamation, it is bombastic no doubt ; perhaps Shakspere meant to imply that a subordinate officer, brought suddenly into the presence of his sovereign, with functions to which he was unaccustomed thrust upon him, would cease to speak simply, as was his wont, and use the biggest words that came into his head. When, however, the critics say that his bombastic phraseology is not like Shakspere's, even when Shakspere is most bombastic, we pass, I think, into vagueness, and cannot agree upon a decision : I believe, on the contrary, that the insincere emphasis of Macbeth, when he too is speaking unnaturally, and forcing himself to use strong expressions, lest men should see into his heart, and recognise him as the murderer of Duncan, by 'his faltering speech and visage discomposed,' resembles very much the sergeant's loud-sounding address :—

Here lay Duncan,  
His silver skin laced with his golden blood,  
And his gashed stabs looked like a breach in Nature,  
For Ruin's wasteful entrance.

Another point taken by these critics is a supposed inconsistency between the second scene and the third of the first act. They affirm that Cawdor is represented under certain circumstances in the one, and under different circumstances in the

‘Well,’ cried he, ‘Emperor, by God’s grace  
We’ve got you Ratisbon !  
The Marshal’s in the market-place,  
And you’ll be there anon  
To see your flag-bird flap his vans  
Where I, to heart’s desire  
Perched him.’ The Chief’s eye flashed ; his plans  
Soared up again like fire.  
The Chief’s eye flashed ; but presently  
Softened itself, as sheathes  
A film the mother eagle’s eye  
When her bruised eaglet breathes ;  
‘You’re wounded.’ ‘Nay’—his soldier’s pride  
Touched to the quick—he said :  
‘I’m killed, sire,’ and his chief beside  
Smiling—the boy fell dead.

other. I do not admit that this inconsistency is made out. The sergeant knows nothing of Cawdor, who therefore was not in the battle, not fighting against Macbeth. The ‘assistance’ (a most general term) given by him to Norway, was probably ‘the hidden help and vantage’ referred to by Angus. There is, therefore, no reason why Macbeth should not reply to the salutation of the witches—‘The Thane of Cawdor lives a prosperous gentleman,’ nor again why he should not afterwards repeat,

The Thane of Cawdor ! why do you dress me  
In borrowed robes ?

It is Angus, not present in the prior scene, who answers him, ‘Who was the Thane lives yet,’ &c. But the answer of Angus, perhaps higher in rank and therefore the natural spokesman, is sufficient for the purpose, and there was no necessity for entering into further details. I am ashamed of wasting your time upon such trifling points of criticism: but, after all, it is not a trifling matter to be told that the greatest effort of uninspired genius is more or less the work of patchers and cobblers. Such judgments carelessly thrown out, and carelessly assented to, seem to take all solid ground from underneath our feet, and to plunge us into bogs and quicksands.

For instance, it may be true that if scene five, act three, had occurred in a drama not attributed to Shakspere, no one would have discovered in it a trace of Shakspere’s manner :—

This night I’ll spend  
Unto a dismal and a fatal end.  
Great business must be wrought ere noon.  
Upon the corner of the moon  
There hangs a vaporous drop profound ;  
I’ll catch it ere it come to ground :  
And that, distilled by magic sleights,  
Shall raise such artificial sprites,  
As, by the strength of their illusion,  
Shall draw him on to his confusion ;  
He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear  
His hopes ’bove wisdom, grace, and fear ;  
And, you all know, security  
Is mortals’ chiefest enemy.

These seem to me fine choral lyrics, but how far I am induced to think so by reading them as Shakspere's I am now driven to doubt. I can only say that to talk of Shakspere's manner here is, in my judgment, beside the question. The witch element of 'Macbeth' stands quite alone; there is nothing the least like it in any of Shakspere's other works. We have, therefore, no guide as to the manner, but must leave these bold choruses to be their own interpretation. It is, moreover, a strange mode of proceeding to argue after that fashion. The lines do occur in a play attributed to Shakspere, and we *have* to deal with them accordingly. I recollect my narrow escape from a flogging a great many years ago. 'I stood with bated breath and whispering humbleness' before Dr. Keate, of famous memory; just because a puzzle-headed old clock, coeval, for aught I know, with Shakspere himself, chose to strike three quarters instead of the proper hour of two. The Doctor bellowed down my excuses with what might fairly be called 'purpureo ore,' and fiercely delivered himself of this ukase. 'Clock, sir! Don't talk to me about clocks! Even if there were no clock, you were bound to be in time.' 'Yes, sir,' I ventured to reply, 'if there were no clock, but there *is* a clock;—This seemed to strike him as reasonable. He could not well say that I was either a fool or a liar (his usual dilemma); therefore he subsided gradually into a milder growl, and I went my way unflogged.

So I say now, here *is* a play of Shakspere's and here *are* the choruses in it. What we should think about the matter if we stumbled upon them elsewhere, and they did not exist in 'Macbeth,' is little to the purpose.

Next, with regard to the Porter. Some of you may possibly recollect that I referred to him in a former lecture. Messrs. Clark and Wright observed that Coleridge long ago said: 'This low soliloquy of the Porter, and his few speeches afterwards, I believe to have been written for the stage by some other hand.'

I urged upon you, when I spoke of ‘Macbeth’ last time, that in all tragedy of the highest order, if there were no interval between the mighty conflicts of passion—no respite or lull—the tension of the mind would be too great and too continuous—I suggested that this lull or cessation of feeling was produced upon the Greek stage (I might add that it is also, to a certain extent, produced in ‘Macbeth,’ where there is less comedy than usual) by majestic dances, by solemn music, by the brilliant strains of a carefully-chosen chorus—I pointed out, moreover, that even the French dramatists, when under the influence of an enthusiasm deeper and stronger than usual, were driven by a similar poetical instinct (as in ‘Esther’ and ‘Athalie’) to vary their methods and break up the traditional monotony of French tragic verse.

With reference to our own writers, I went on to observe that they aimed at reaching the same end by a different road—that not the rouged and varnished passions of queens and confidantes, but the living mass of human nature as a whole, was the raw material on which their genius worked.

They strove, therefore, to tone down all over-mastering excitement, to withdraw all undue pressure from the nerves, by bringing home to us in every form, this undoubted truth, that, after all, the main ocean of human existence is wider, deeper, and more enduring than the transitory joys and sorrows of particular men and women, however high in place. Some top-most wave or so may break into foam, and perish thus beneath the fury of the tempest; But still, far below, the inner fountains of the great deep, un vexed by these petty agitations over the surface, keep on for ever with a majestic sameness, feeding its life according to the eternal laws.

This dim sense of the greatness and unchangeableness of the world, underlying all personal calamities and all individual entanglements of passion and sin, lends, I think, a breadth and

a depth to many tragic situations that doubles their interest for us.

It surely adds much to the pathos of any such calamitous surprises, to reflect that mighty kings may perish without warning; that lovely and beloved queens may be cut off by the most miserable of fates, whilst the unsympathising stars of heaven roll on as usual, and the great ebb and flow of our common humanity is not affected even for a moment. I know, as far as I am concerned, that no regular history of the French Revolution ever sent so keen a thrill of pity into my heart for its victims as a little Paris almanack which I once possessed, for 1792, 1793, and 1794. There you saw the ruthless indifference of those dreadful years to the grim events that have since been distilled into large volumes—as if they were all that men at that period cared for or thought of.

On Monday a man slipped down in the frost and broke his leg; on Tuesday a cart was upset, and two casks of Bourgogne rouge were spilt in the gutter; on Wednesday, Vergniaud Guadet Gensonné, et cinquante-trois autres, à la guillotine; on Thursday a new comedy was successful at one of the minor theatres; on Friday the winepress of the national wrath overflowed again, with a redness, alas! that was not the redness of the grape; Veuve Capet—à la guillotine; on Saturday a fire at a baker's shop in the Faubourg St. Antoine was discovered, but soon extinguished without doing any damage. It was when I felt the heart-rending pathos of these dreadful juxtapositions, that a strange sense came over me, how the French nation was here departing from its old tragic canons, and proving, perhaps against its will, how much truer a conception of the drama those barbarians, sneered at by Voltaire, in reality had. It was by the instinct of genius that our old dramatists lighted upon a truth which I learnt painfully from the Paris almanack. Accordingly, they never allow us to forget the world beyond, and give a profound philosophical harmony to their creations by

making us feel and see that behind the special passions which they paint, the multitude of other men go on eating and drinking, laughing and playing, working and resting, as usual—that no single unit among the infinities of number occupies more than a very limited portion of space or time.

Hence, also, that other low dialogue between the Grave-diggers in ‘Hamlet.’ Hence a hundred other comic scenes, not necessary to dwell upon. In ‘Macbeth,’ indeed, as I have said, this comic element is more sparingly introduced than is common with Shakspere; but why? Because, as anyone can see for himself, like Sophocles or *Æschylus*, he makes his chorus do its work. When, however, he does introduce it in the person of this discredited Porter, the sudden transition from a most intense interest to the unthinking mirth and easy indifference of the servants’ hall, is, to my mind, more remarkable in one respect than anything of the same kind to be met with elsewhere. It differs from other similar passages; and it differs thus—whereas each of *them* is interposed like an armistice between two neighbouring outbursts of tragic passion, this passage, on the other hand, is linked to the tragedy on each side of it by a mysterious kinship, by a tie, as it were, of electrical affinity.

The same trivial incident, which is the immediate origin of the Porter’s humorous grumblings, breaks in upon Macbeth and his wife like the summoning trumpet of the judgment day. They are standing apart in a sort of trance, hag-ridden by the nightmare of murder, with an unfordable river of innocent blood flowing between them and the rest of mankind; when suddenly, upon the muttered remorse of the half-delirious assassin, upon the gloomy comfortings of the savage woman, upon the intense isolation of the guilty pair, comes back the reaction of ordinary life; To them, as to the drunken Porter, there arrives the knocking at the gate.<sup>1</sup> Now if these knockings be two, and not one; if Shakspere heard only the first, and Middleton only

<sup>1</sup> See De Quincey on the knocking at the gate in ‘Macbeth.’

the second, I, at any rate, and I believe most Englishmen with me, must go to school again and learn the alphabet of criticism afresh. I shall pass over as comparatively unimportant several points of difference between the editors and myself, and proceed to the end of the play at once. They will not have Macbeth's last speech, nor will they have the succeeding forty lines with which the audience is dismissed. Of course if Middleton were Shakspere's coadjutor throughout, he may well have written the last scene ; but the editors play fast and loose with that supposition, and indeed, unless a great deal more is spurious than they have noted, the idea of a regular partnership seems to me quite untenable. Again, the hypothesis, thrown out at random, that Shakspere, after sketching out the plot of 'Macbeth,' reserved to himself only the scenes where Macbeth and Lady Macbeth appear, will not answer their purpose any better, seeing that several speeches of Macbeth are no more safe from burglarious intrusion than other portions of the play. Whilst, if we suppose, according to the somewhat hesitating inference at the end, that the last forty lines were interpolated, or rather, to coin a word for this occasion only, postpolated after Shakspere's death, how was the original catastrophe disposed of? Shakspere's play, before it was meddled with, had, I presume, an end. What then became of that end ? There is not, perhaps, with the exception of old Siward's speech, much poetry in the last scene.

Had he his hurts before ?

ROSSE.

Ay, on the front.

SIWARD.

Why then, God's soldier be he !  
Had I as many sons as I have hairs,  
I would not wish them to a fairer death :  
And so, his knell is knolled.

This is worthy of Shakspere, and reminds us of the Duke of Ormonde's proud and loving sorrow, 'I would rather have my

dead son than any living son in Christendom.' There is not, I say, with this exception, anything of high poetical merit after Macbeth's final exit—but why? Just because high poetical merit is not required. 'Retreat,'—'Flourish,'—'Enter, with drums, trumpets, and colours, old Siward, Rosse, the other Thanes, Malcolm, and soldiers.' Shakspere is here in his subordinate character, not the poet of the world, but the manager and playwright of 'the Globe.' Æsthetic and philosophical critics are too apt to forget that he was, at all times, both ; that he composed his play, in the first instance at any rate, for the stage and not for the closet. In this, his inferior capacity, he may well have thought that all this noise, bustle, and movement needed no more, by way of help, than a few words of ordinary theatrical commonplace;<sup>1</sup> and that the business speeches before us were good enough, taking in Siward's speech, more than good enough, to answer his immediate purpose. As to Macbeth's last speech, it is a fine one, whoever wrote it. We must bear in mind that he is a man of excitable imagination, conscious that the time has been when

His senses would have cool'd  
To hear a night shriek, and his fell of hair  
Would, at a dismal treatise, rouse and stir  
As life was in it.

He was stung to fresh crimes because he could not rest, because he was compelled

To lie upon the torture of the mind  
In restless ecstasy.

And because his wild imagination, overreaching his judgment, kept painting pictures of peace and happiness and security—if but one more step in blood were taken. Shakspere, however, felt that although Macbeth has yielded to a sudden and exceptional temptation, he is still a knight and a soldier. As soon

<sup>1</sup> Several plays of Euripides end with one and the same formula—a very prosaic one—just because, I suppose, as in England so at Athens, high poetry would have been thrown away upon men fidgeting in their seats, or beginning to make their way out of the theatre.

as hope is absolutely quenched, as soon as ruin is inevitable and close at hand, his gloomy fancy, so long preternaturally excited and abused, falls away into the background of his character for ever : He recalls the instincts of his youth, recovers his self-respect as he draws his sword, and braces his nerves to die like a man :—

I will not yield,  
 To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet,  
 And to be baited with the rabble's curse.  
 Though Birnam Wood be come to Dunsinane,  
 And thou opposed, being of no woman born,  
 Yet will I try the last. Lay on, Macduff ;  
 And damn'd be he that first cries, 'Hold—enough.'

I do not know who wrote this speech, but it reminds me not a little of Homer—I mean, of course, that it reminds me of the Hellenic Middleton who composed that particular portion of the so-called 'Iliad' containing the Death of Hector.

Hector also, as long as he trusted in Apollo and in Zeus, sought, if not by guilty, at least by ignominious methods, to prolong his life ; but when inevitable Death frowned upon him face to face, the spirit of the hero and the patriot rose up to meet it without flinching : He emerged, from a strange cloud of terror and despair, to die like the Sun, to die amid a flush of glory, bright enough to keep alive in the minds of men, the memory of that setting for evermore :—

' Fate grasps me, yet I will not die ashamed ;  
 Die without Honour, without energy ;  
 But after some great deed, long to be named,  
 Among the men who are about to be.'  
 He spake, and drew forth the keen blade that hung  
 Down by his side, blade strongly forged and great,  
 Massing himself together, as he sprung.  
 Thus the high-soaring eagle dashes, straight  
 Through murky clouds, upon the plain, to tear  
 Some tender lamb away, or trembling hare.  
 So Hector sprang, his sword a quivering flame ;  
 Achilles rushed to meet him, as he came.

I fear too much time has been spent in examining these *minutiae*; but the destructive criticism, the architecture of ruin, originated by Wolfe, and followed up by his pupils in Germany and here, irritates me more than enough; not so much on account of the results aimed at (a critic must perform his appointed task regardless of consequences), as on account of the curious self-complacency, with which the members of this *bande noire* turn to these unwelcome labours: They break up the cloud-capt towers, the gorgeous palaces, and solemn temples of the Past, without sympathy—without any feelings of reverence or regret; on the contrary, they exult, as the former Sans-culottes did, whilst attacking one venerable building after another.

However, come what may, at last we have got ‘Macbeth,’ whether written by Shakspere alone, or by Shakspere and Middleton, or by Shakspere and some anonymous coadjutor. Let us be thankful for that. As I said on a former occasion, the Greek and English elements of tragedy meet therein with astonishing, if not with unequalled, dramatic force: Besides this, unless I am wrong in fancying that the unhappy Jewish King Ahab, and his terrible wife, have re-shaped themselves here under new names, through the transfiguring imagination of the poet, then there is a third element—the element, it may perhaps be called, of Hebrew intensity—brought in to enrich and to animate this master-piece of original creative genius.<sup>1</sup>

Returning, however, to the Greek idea of Destiny, as it was conceived by Æschylus and Sophocles; the whole play is overhung by it, from first to last. To borrow an expression from Plato, its place is upon the ‘knees of the Goddess Necessity.’ Accordingly, I think it most important that no time should be lost in impressing this aspect of the tragedy upon the mind of

<sup>1</sup> I had discussed these points at some length in the previous lecture—the lecture on ‘Hamlet.’ Having said my say about ‘Hamlet,’ I touched upon ‘Macbeth’ before concluding.

the hearer or reader : we must be lifted at once out of common life into a life of vision.

Within that sphere of the unearthly and phantasmal, where all the limits of truth and falsehood are undistinguishably blended together in a haze of alternating light and darkness, whilst the unchanging cloud of Fate remains fixed and implacable above, we must be prepared to see Macbeth suddenly solicited by devilish temptations, temptations known to us beforehand from the very opening of the drama.

For this reason, therefore, among other reasons, I cannot surrender to the knives of these amputating editors the first scene, with its well-known chorus,

When shall we three meet again,  
In thunder, lightning, or in rain ?

This self-introducing appearance of the Midnight Hags, is in my judgment, absolutely necessary. If we had not already learnt that the Witches were coming expressly to meet Macbeth after the battle, their approach for the first time upon the blasted heath, without any precise explanation of their purposes, would be somewhat awkward and inartistic.

As it is, we feel that they have flown right 'through the fog and filthy air,' to apply their dangerous wiles, just at the most dangerous moment ; to sow their poisoned seeds in the soul of Macbeth, and to win him over to treason and murder by skilfully inflaming his wild and wayward imagination.

I suppose that every criminal finds out for himself some specious excuses, that soothe his own mind, and hide away under certain veils and coverings the ugly nakedness of his guilt.

As for Macbeth, it is probable that Shakspeare conceived him as throwing his original fault upon that Destiny which seizes him as her helpless instrument. He tries to persuade himself that the pressure of Fate (and but for that he might have remained innocent and loyal) is an irresistible pressure—

If chance will have me king,  
 Then chance may crown me.  
 This supernatural soliciting  
 Cannot be ill, and cannot be good, &c.

At any rate, he is deceived in no other way. Nothing, indeed, can be more remarkable than his keen insight into all the consequences of the deed before it has been perpetrated. His vivid imagination presents, to the eye of conscience, a picture complete in all its details, and the numerous reasons against himself stand before him, appareled in their fullest and clearest light ;

He 's here in double trust :

First, as I am his kinsman and his subject ;  
 Strong both against the deed: then, as his host,  
 Who should against his murderer shut the door,  
 Not bear the knife myself.—Besides, this Duncan  
 Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been  
 So clear in his great office, &c.

His resolution even seems to oscillate for a moment, and he tries to think that he is meditating repentance ; seems to oscillate, I say, and tries to think, for the ebbing of the will is not real, and he knows that it is not real—knows that it will soon come back upon him with fresh power, like a returning tide :—

We will proceed no further in this business, &c.

The one thing that Macbeth has not sufficiently apprehended is the power of punishment reserved to itself by that same representative faculty, when the possible has passed into the actual, and when the fantastical thought of murder has made itself incarnate and become

Portion and parcel of the dreadful Past.

This sting of conscience acting, not so much upon the moral sense as upon the fancy and the nerves, is the peculiarity that distinguishes Macbeth from other criminals ; Though he knows all the time, that his eyes are made the fools of his

other senses, that the dagger seen by him is but ‘a dagger of the mind,’ a false creation, ‘proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain;’ nevertheless, he cannot put it aside. Influenced by the same natural constitution, although he feels but little true remorse, as soon as the deed is done, he falls under (what may be called) a regular possession. Every corner of his soul is occupied and held fast by the abiding presence of an inexorable phantom ; He can think of nothing else, not because he feels regret, but because the bloody details have become a part of himself, and are reflected without any respite from all the facets of his imagination. He has no capacity of self-restraint —no capacity of self-deception, or even of momentary forgetfulness, so that memory presses upon him with a heavy and ever-increasing weight ; It galls him so that he cannot keep still, and is driven to devise new plans of ruin and murder, not so much for their own sake, or in hopes of security, as because perpetual action is his only way to escape from agony—his only way of freeing himself from the grasp of these merciless reminiscences. For such a mind as his we may well grant that the form of the temptation, clothing itself, as it does, in all the attributes of supernatural power, was calculated to exercise an influence alike strong and lasting. Creatures, possessed of knowledge more than human, have prophesied that he is set apart and foredoomed to reign. He accepts this destiny as a gift, not understanding, in the first instance, how high a price he will have to pay for it. Very soon, however, the desire to obtain what Fate has decreed is kindled within him, like a consuming fire, so that when he discovers that to earn the fiend’s wages he must do the fiend’s work, he fixes his eyes upon the result alone, overleaps all his scruples, and nerves himself to accomplish the task required by Hell with the least possible delay ; This he does, in spite of the clearest self-knowledge.

That Shakspere intended to paint Macbeth as yielding to an exceptional and artfully devised allurement, I think

one may learn by considering the character and position of Banquo.

This rival general is, no doubt, described by Macbeth in terms of high admiration, but he is so described, because the usurper, according to the instincts of his nature, imaginatively bestows upon Banquo's character all the qualities that fit him to become a watchful observer and a formidable enemy. Banquo, however, as he is, not as he is seen by Macbeth, presents himself to us, I think, as one also affected by the blighting influence of the weird sisters.

Thou hast it now—King—Cawdor—Glamis—all  
As the weird women promised ; and, I fear,  
Thou'st played most foully for it ; yet 'twas said,  
It should not stand in thy posterity,  
But that myself should be the root, and father  
Of many kings—if there come truth from them.

May they not be my oracles as well,  
And set me up in Hope ?

Immediately after this, Banquo, unlike Macduff, whose loyalty to Duncan is unquenchable, accepts the character of servant and courtier to the new king.

He is waiting, not certainly upon Providence in the ordinary sense of the word, but upon Fate—waiting, to overlook, perhaps to hurry on, if he can, the accomplishment of those predictions belonging to himself and his progeny.

He shows no sympathy with or affection for, Malcolm ; he is urged by no generous impulse to vindicate 'his bloody cousins' from the accusations of that man whom he himself knows to be the real assassin. It is, moreover, worth a remark that this trafficking with the accursed thing—this misprision of treason and murder—probably caused his own death. Had he been single-minded and true-hearted, like Macduff, he would not have drifted into the web of treachery spun by Macbeth to catch his life, but removed himself at once out of the usurper's reach.

Of Banquo, however, or the rest of the *dramatis personæ*, it is unnecessary to say much. The power of the play is not shown in the subordinate characters. It is less rich in this respect than many of the other plays—for example, than ‘The Tempest.’ Its power, as I have said before, is shown rather in the grandeur and untiring march of the plot; in the astonishing force of the marvellous and supernatural element; but above all, in the display of feminine strength and masculine weakness, as shown forth by Lady Macbeth and her husband.

It must also be borne in mind always, that this is not sham masculine, but real feminine strength. Lady Macbeth is a bad woman, but she is a woman throughout. Mrs. Siddons always affirmed that she herself was too tall, and dark, and powerful, to give full effect to her favourite character; She maintained, and I think rightly, that Lady Macbeth’s concentrated intensity of will and awful presence of mind are not logically opposed to the weak remorse and vacillating temper lodged in the huge limbs of her mediæval fighting man, unless we mask them by the outward form of a delicate, graceful, and attractive woman.

Duncan, you will recollect, is delighted with her, ‘as his most gracious hostess.’ Even Macduff, in the first agony of his loyal sorrow, addresses her thus:—

Oh gentle lady,  
‘Tis not for you to hear, what I can speak.  
The repetition in a woman’s ear  
Would murder it as fell—O Banquo, Banquo !

And when, in order to direct the attention of those around from Macbeth, she pretends to faint, he calls out eagerly, ‘Look to the Lady.’ Her claims upon this complimentary deference and chivalrous attention are not to be shaken, even by the brutal murder of his beloved master, bitterly as he feels it; Her character was hidden from him under the semblance of ‘a gentle lady.’

The hand also, as we know well, ‘that all the perfumes of

.Arabia could not sweeten,' was *a little hand*: And finally, the grim reticence and self-mastery, never allowing any consciousness of crime to embarrass her demeanour, or spoil her high breeding, are followed by effects which all the sufferings and struggles of her husband fail to produce upon him. He pours himself out in storms of passionate remorse, but we do not hear that the doctor is called in to prescribe for any bodily ailment of his: His frame, it would seem, is too vigorous to wither away because the mind is distempered. Her wounds bleed inwardly, and simply kill her as she smiles; the spirit may be unconquerable, but the flesh is weak.<sup>1</sup>

I think, on referring to one or two of the more important scenes, we shall see how much the tragical splendour of the situation is enhanced by adopting Mrs. Siddons's belief. Nor should we overlook the fact that these terrible feminine qualities of hers are *qualities*, and not in themselves faults.

Whether there be any essential difference between men and women; whether, for instance, the instincts of motherhood either presuppose or awaken something in the female soul which the male is without; or whether, as Plato in his 'Republic' declares, social habits, acting without intermission, through thousands of years, have gradually modified the respective types of character, I do not know; possibly it never will or can be known. This, however, is obvious to all men, that women, on many occasions, exercise powers beyond all masculine rivalry—I might add, all masculine comprehension. Whenever I see a woman through continuous nights and days at the side of a sick bed, or under the avalanche of some unexpected calamity, ordering—literally as it were ordering—her nerves to become fibres of steel, and facing what has to be faced with intense directness of purpose and presence of mind, I always feel rather ashamed of myself and my sex: We have, I trust, good points of our

<sup>1</sup> I do not believe that she committed suicide. We assist at her death, and hear nothing about it. What could Malcolm know of the matter?

own : But in the difficulties of life, when emotion has to be sternly repressed, anxiety muffled and kept silent; even despair postponed, because the present moment needs and summons us with its cry of '*Hoc age*'—we do not shine. A woman says to herself, ' You may grieve, or give way, or die, if you please, at your leisure hereafter, but now this thing, and this thing only, has to be done—do it with all your heart.' In such difficulties of life, I say, men and women usually stand to each other in relations very much like (*mutatis mutandis*, let us hope) those of Macbeth towards his wife. The worthier gender, for so grammarians presume to call it, scarcely exhibits itself as the superior article. So deeply rooted, indeed, in the woman's nature is this power over her own thoughts, that even in the midst of these exhausting visions that drain away her life, Lady Macbeth does not lose her gifts of self-restraint and pre-eminence of will ; She still encourages and supports her irresolute accomplice ; she still suggests and acts over each careful stratagem meant to baffle enquiry and to achieve success. Shakspere is always great in dealing with sleep; certainly never greater than when the Royal Lady, so smooth, so gracious, and self-possessed, under the light of the sun, is cheated out of her secrecy by a dreaming conscience, and reveals to midnight listeners the memories that rise up and sting her to death.

In this scene also, we find, I think, another proof how accurate the insight of Mrs. Siddons was into Shakspere's conception of the character. This proof is afforded by the nature of Lady Macbeth's regrets. It is the disgust of the gently nurtured lady at the outward disfigurement and taint of blood, rather than genuine remorse for the deed of murder, that occupies her soul in secret, and forces those ill-omened words through her unconscious lips. It is not, I believe, generally known that in this scene Mrs. Siddons departed from the old stage tradition. I recollect hearing, when I was a boy, her account

of the dispute with Sheridan (the playhouse manager) upon this point. She narrated to a company, of whom I formed one, how she battled, and how she prevailed. Mrs. Yates, her famous predecessor in the part, always kept the candle in her hand whilst the imaginary washing of it was going on. Mrs. Siddons, whose instincts were truer to nature, determined, in the teeth of the strongest opposition, to get rid of it first, as a waking person would undoubtedly do : Sheridan gave way with much reluctance, and as the play proceeded, a sense of danger from this bold innovation, before such staunch conservatives as play-goers then were, seized him with redoubled force. He hammered at the door of her dressing room, he plied her with entreaties that she would forego her rash purpose. ‘No,’ she replied (I recollect now the deep tones of the fine old lady, as she triumphantly recalled that ancient struggle). ‘Go away, Mr. Sheridan. I am dressing, sir ; you cannot be admitted; my mind is made up.’ Accordingly, on she came, and set the candle down. For a moment she felt, or fancied, that something like doubt, something like disapproval, was in the air, and her heart beat hard with anxiety. It was only for a moment, however ; a breath of sympathy seemed to pass through the silence of that crowded theatre, and then, all at once, the watchful attention of the spectators relaxed itself, and broke forth into a tempest of applause.

## LECTURE IX.

'MACBETH,' 'THE TEMPEST.'

BEFORE proceeding to examine 'The Tempest,' we may as well put into form the conclusions reached by us about 'Macbeth.' These, you will recollect, are—that this play, though it may not equal 'Hamlet' in depth of thought or breadth of vision; though it does not reproduce the heart-rending pathos of 'Lear' or 'Othello,' surpasses them both in grandeur of conception, and in the continuous intensity with which the poet marches onward towards his goal. It is, I believe, of all Shakspere's dramas, the one most likely to have been envied by Æschylus; to have been selected by Aristotle for special honours; to have been accepted as a prophet-like revelation of Jehovah's dealings with the children of men, by Isaiah and Ezekiel. It abounds also, more than any other, I think, even of Shakspere's works, with those wonderful flashes of suggestion—those pregnant phrases, wherein to my mind the highest poetry abides—phrases, I mean, perfectly simple in themselves, that might and would be unpretending prose, if made use of on any ordinary occasion. They are above all exquisiteness of diction, and without the slightest colour of ornament, spotless and transparent indeed as rock-crystal itself; but through that perfect transparency, we are enabled to behold in them infinite reflections of thought and feeling, from the remotest corners and crevices of the human heart.

You know the passages referred to, I dare say, quite as well as I know them ; still, as they cannot be dwelt upon too often I may perhaps be permitted to recall a few of them to your attention ; and to point out, as shortly as I can, what constitutes their matchless power. To begin with Macbeth's first approach to the confiding Duncan :—

There is no art,  
To find the mind's construction in the face :  
He was a gentleman on whom I built  
An absolute trust—Oh worthiest cousin !

Here, on the first ominous appearance of the deeper and deadlier traitor, these three commonplace words, ‘Oh worthiest cousin,’ coming as they do immediately after Macbeth’s earliest interview with the weird sisters, contain the germ of the whole tragedy. They make us feel that great events, possible only through the unguarded simplicity of Duncan, who never suspects till discovery has made suspicion useless, are impending, and close at hand. We know that Macbeth’s ambition has been awakened and his imagination debauched, by the skilful suggestions of that juggling fiend, who has just been paltering with him in a double sense, and we see how Duncan’s easiness gives him an opportunity to act at once.

Again, what a wonderful revelation of Lady Macbeth’s inner mind opens itself before us when, for one moment, she is startled into dangerous sincerity by this unexpected announcement, ‘The King comes here to-night.’ ‘Thou art mad to say so’ breaks out against and beyond her will—but this irrepressible disclosure of all that is at work within her troubled mind, though it may fall idly on the ear of the unthinking messenger, is a weakness on her part, and she feels it to be a weakness : How impressive is the power over herself, retrieving this imprudence with a bitter irony intelligible only to herself and God—

Give him tending :  
He brings great news.

What a lesson also we learn from the first dialogue between Macbeth and his wife :—

My dearest love,  
Duncan comes here to-night.

LADY MACBETH.

And when goes hence ?

MACBETH.

To-morrow—*as he purposed.*

LADY MACBETH.

Oh never  
Shall sun that morrow see.

Macbeth needs firm anchoring ground to keep his resolution stedfast and fixed ; he finds it, where he knew he would find it, in the stern tenacity of his wife. In the very next scene how fine the art by which Macbeth is made to assume prematurely, though darkly, the Royal manner :—

If you shall cleave to my consent when 'tis,  
It shall make honour for you.

The effect of his strange speech, addressed to a kinsman and an equal, is evident from Banquo's reserved and suspicious reply :—

So I lose none,  
In seeking to augment it, but still keep  
My bosom franchised, and allegiance clear,  
I shall be counselled.

In these few words we see the birth of that reciprocal distrust between Banquo and Macbeth, inspiring Banquo's subsequent speech :—

Thou hast it now—King—Cawdor—Glamis—all  
That the weird sisters promised ; and, I fear,  
Thou'st played most foully for it.

And impelling Macbeth to land his rival in that ditch

Where safe he lies,  
With twenty trenchèd gashes on his head,  
The least a death to nature.

Then, after the murder of Duncan has been committed, with how light and easy a touch does the great master of life and passion anatomise, and lay bare for us, the minutest fibres of the murderer's conscience :—

Goes the king hence to-day ?

MACBETH.

He does—*he did appoint so.*

Lady Macbeth would have said, he does, and stopped there; but in the less determined and more sensitive criminal, some blind throbs of honour, some useless reaction of a perishing moral sense, shrank from and qualified the lie :—

He does—*he did appoint so.*

Again, what a picture of intense anxiety Macbeth exhibits whilst waiting, as if for the explosion of a mine beneath his feet, till the cry of discovery makes itself heard : He has to listen, or pretend to listen, to Lennox babbling about the weather, just able to croak out, with a vague sense of what is fretting his ear, ‘ ‘Twas a rough night.’ This form of poetry I value much; because, according to me, such passages give us poetry in its essence : with no infusion of rhetoric, no amalgamation with what is called thought, but Poetry itself. If the poet is a rhetorician, so much the better ; if he is a philosopher, so much the better; if he is a man of good sense and experience, so much the better. Rhetoric, philosophy, good sense, and experience are the natural alloys used in his mint. A poem, poetry and nothing else, could not circulate freely—any more than a sovereign could circulate like its fellows, if it were made up entirely of the purest gold. Still, after all, the other elements, in both, are alloys—not the intrinsic substance or dominant metal.

At any rate, we may say, perhaps, that, whether my views

about poetry are consented to or not, such illuminating dramatic revelations are never given to the world except by poets of the highest order.

I repeat and recur to the words, flash and illumination, because they alone express my meaning fully. I seek in vain to put aside the metaphor for another equally forcible and just. When I dwell upon such phrases as those quoted above, I seem to see rising before me a summer night, over-loaded with thunder-clouds—a night, dark, to use the proverbial expression, as a wolf's mouth : out of whose depths, suddenly and without notice, the lightning rushes forth ; It flings forward the whole hidden landscape into almost painful distinctness and life ; so that every cottage, every spire, every wood, every hill, down to the silver strip of sea glancing up under the distant horizon, become clearer and more manifest than by day.

Difficult as it may be to leave 'Macbeth,' still it must be done—and who should lure us away more successfully than Prospero and Miranda? One last word, however, I must add, in reference to the Witches. I have an impression on my mind that I have already said something of the kind ; but as the witches belong to 'Macbeth,' you will perhaps pardon me for recurring to the point here, even though I am repeating myself more or less.

If the effect produced by these weird sisters when presented before us in the flesh be, even now, immense, what must it have been when judges and bishops proved their faith in witchcraft by condemning and burning accused persons every day ? When the King wrote against sorcerers, when no spectator at the play could be sure that some undiscovered witch or wizard was not sitting on the bench behind him ?

We cannot doubt that this brilliant poetical embodiment of a faith still alive must, like the analogous introduction of the Eumenides on the Athenian stage, have produced an interest and an agitation—as a matter of course—which cannot be

revived or created, for us sceptics now, by any effort of the imagination.

In turning from ‘Macbeth’ to ‘The Tempest,’ we pass from the deepest gloom into the most vivid sunshine. Instead of the crushing oppression of the thunderstorm, we are refreshed by ocean breezes akin to those that blew across Pindar’s Elysian islands, ruled by Saturn the beneficent. The whole atmosphere of ‘The Tempest,’ indeed, seems impregnated with Elysian influences ; and I am at once reminded of the lovely lyrical outburst in the second Olympiad. The Greek is too long to read to you here. Perhaps, therefore, you will accept of an inadequate English translation :—

Then, then, the Good, beneath a sun, whose light  
Shines ever, without setting, day and night,  
Their happy years begin :  
By their worn hands the earth is vexed no more,  
Nor the sea smitten with the toiling oar,  
A scanty meal to win.  
Zeus leads them on, crowning their brave endeavour,  
To Time’s far home of happy rest,  
Where the soft Ocean-breezes float for ever  
Around the island of the blest.  
There golden bloom to bloom succeeds,  
Through Springs that never tire ;  
They fill with light the ground below,  
Athwart the shining trees they glow ;  
Their growth the very water feeds,  
Hid under flowers of fire.

In spite, however, of the difference between these two plays, they are alike in one respect. They are both lyrical dramas, and in both the lyrics are assigned to creatures partaking of an unearthly character. Here, however, the resemblance ends. In the tragedy the writer’s mood touches upon that mood of the sister art,

When some great painter dips  
His pencil in the gloom of earthquake and eclipse.

In ‘The Tempest,’  
All things are drawn  
From May-time, and the cheerful dawn.

Some critics may say, perhaps, that it is less powerful than one or two of the serious dramas ; but after all, though less spasmodically impressive, sunshine is stronger than storm ; and ‘*The Tempest*,’ whether less powerful or not than ‘*Macbeth*,’ is certainly not less wonderful. To borrow a phrase from the one man whose phrases are fit to describe it, ‘It ascends the highest heaven of Invention :’ And if we were called upon to publish those plays of Shakspere which no one else could have written, in the order of their impossibility, I, for one, should head with ‘*The Tempest*’ the title-page of that golden book : It is to ‘*The Tempest*,’ no doubt, that the great Doctor refers, when, shaking off for a moment the creeping prejudices that be-mossed and be-lichened his massive understanding, he penned those noble lines :—

Each phase of many-coloured life he drew,  
Exhausted worlds, and then imagined new.

Do not misunderstand me : I still think ‘*Macbeth*’ the highest achievement of human genius that I know of ; but if I may venture to introduce here a homely metaphor, derived from the habits and pursuits of Yorkshire, my native county, Beaumont, the author of the passionate dialogues in the ‘*Maid’s Tragedy*’ and ‘*Philaster*;’ Fletcher, to whom, in ‘*Thierry and Theodore*,’ Charles Lamb assigns the honour of having written the finest serious scene out of Shakspere ; Webster and Ford, would, each and all of them, have run a better second to their master, in competing with ‘*Macbeth*,’ than any man that ever lived could have accomplished, in competing with ‘*The Tempest*.’ In the first of these cases, Shakspere, if I may be pardoned for pursuing the analogy, only wins in a canter ; in the other, to employ a phrase of Turf origin, no doubt, but which yet has passed into common speech, and been applied to other subjects, it is ‘*Eclipse first, and all the rest nowhere.*’ Nay, further, in saying that ‘*The Tempest*’ is a play such as no one but Shakspere could have written—even then I hardly express

my whole meaning. Shakspere himself, I believe, could not, or at least would not, have been its author had he flourished at any other period of our history. The end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries were times, as we all know, filled to overflowing with energy and life ; The discovery of America, for one thing, and, as it gradually dawned upon the public mind, the ever-growing splendour of that discovery, raised up, for all poets, for all statesmen, for every man of high spirit, and adventurous temper, many new worlds before the outlook of hope and fancy, in addition to the one new world already made known by geographers and buccaneers. Golden cities, hidden far away in the depth of inaccessible deserts ; fairy islands planted, in their tropical loveliness, like thickets of flowers upon a summer sea ; potent emperors, stooping from their gorgeous thrones to receive, with all due humility, the lessons of the true faith ; royal ladies, on the banks of mighty rivers, or amid realms of blossoming forest, strong to govern their warlike Amazons with unquestioned sway—All these dreams and legends acted with almost magical force upon the national heart, and, lending a fresh intensity even to Shakspere's faculties, crystallised themselves under his organising imagination into the perfect beauty of 'The Tempest.'

There is also a special charm found, or fancied, in this play by many enthusiasts, notably by Campbell the poet. Shakspere's retirement from the stage, before the eye of his genius had grown dim, or its natural force abated, must always remain a curious, if not a singular phenomenon. Successful authors, and among successful authors dramatists certainly not the least, have usually clung to their profession. The ordinary danger for them is the temptation to imitate the Archbishop of Grenada in 'Gil Blas :' They persevere, I mean, in vain attempts to create, when the creative faculty is worn out. In this respect, as in all others, Shakspere placed himself apart, for some reason or

other, when about fifty. He decided that he had done enough ; He would not even linger near the scene of his triumphs, or watch the growth of his popularity. No, he left behind him all the excitements of London life ; all the splendours of the Court ; all (and this must have been the hardest part of his sacrifice) the wit and intellectual brilliancy of his friends and disciples. He left all this to become once more a Warwickshire yeoman, a quiet inhabitant, like his forefathers, of a small provincial town. It does not appear that any disappointment or disgust was the cause of this premature retirement, though we know so little about Shakspere's everyday proceedings that it would be unreasonable to speak positively on such a point. In this perplexity, ingenious men have identified the poet with his own magician Prospero. According to them, Prospero's profound soliloquies, his recapitulation of the mighty powers about to be renounced, and the solemnity of repentance prepared for his closing years, have all a covert reference to the writer's own feelings—represent, as in a glass darkly, his own career ; and shadow forth his fixed intention to extricate himself from the pleasures and dangers of his theatrical life. If this be so (unless, indeed, Hamlet be the youth of Shakspere, as Prospero is his serene old age), Shakspere, for the first time, has separated himself from absolute art, and infused into one of his characters thoughts and emotions, deriving their warmth and colour from his own soul :—

But this rough magic  
I here abjure ; and, when I have required  
Some heavenly music (which even now I do)  
To work my end upon their senses, that  
This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,  
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,  
And, deeper than did ever plummet sound,  
I'll drown my book.

These beautiful lines may well bear the inner meaning assigned to them ; nor is it possible, without the deepest interest,

to picture to ourselves this *ἀναξ ἀνθρώπων*—this leader of our race—putting aside all temptations to intellectual pride, feeling that to him also were applicable Daniel's lines—

Unless, above himself, he can  
Erect himself—how poor a thing is man !

And, therefore, deciding that, even for a Shakspere, there is and can be nothing better than to pass the autumn of his days in peace of mind, self-contemplation, and communion with God. This notion of Campbell's, though rather a fanciful one, may well be dwelt upon in sympathy and reverence. It is true that Shakspere thus is stepping out of the circle of pure Art, yet so does Milton step out of it in 'Paradise Lost'; and who would give up the opening lines of the third book: 'Hail holy light!'

Who does not rather wish that Homer had indulged in digressions of a like kind, and taken opportunities, whilst describing the haunts of his boyhood, or the cities which he had visited, to tell us something of himself. Nay, why do I say who does not wish this? We have, in the 'Hymn to Apollo,' a fragment of autobiography or pseudo-biography, genuine enough, at any rate, to raise up for us an image of the benign old man wandering delightedly, with his gift of song, from island to island, and from festival to festival. He stands before us triumphant over all the changes of this mortal life, and calls upon the world to sympathise with his exulting consciousness that, even now, in spite of age and blindness, he can charm the Ionian maidens with legends of more absorbing interest, and melodies of a diviner influence, than any his rivals can invent or remember. I am not bold enough to claim for the original Homer the authorship of the verses I am speaking of (Thucydides, we have learnt, is a mere ignoramus on such matters); but at least they occur in one of the older hymns, and we may hope that they perpetuate a living tradition, even if the blind old bard be here personated by some descendant or successor :—

Farewell, now, all my maidens, and hereafter  
 Remember me, when some worn traveller  
 Comes in my place, and asks you this—‘ What man  
 Of all the bards most sweetly sings for you,  
 In whom, above the rest, take ye delight?’  
 Then, with one gentle voice unanimous,  
 Make answer, pausing not—‘ The blind old man,  
 Who dwells among the rugged cliffs of Chios.’

I, therefore, am quite willing to accept the above supposition, and to believe that we read the thoughts of Shakspere himself in certain passages of ‘The Tempest’; that we hear the voice of Shakspere himself underlying the gentle and gracious accents of the wise magician, Prospero. The Shakspere of the Sonnets, with a heart disturbed by remorse, and sore from the treacherous ill-usage of those whom he loved and trusted, renews himself here, under a nobler and serener aspect —We now see one who has ceased to rail and murmur ; who, having mastered the secrets of life, and fathomed human nature to its lowest depths, can afford to look upon it with a godlike indulgence. For a time, indeed, he struggled and fought against destiny, till its fetters eat into his flesh : But at the last he stands forth, like the ideal sage of his brother-poet, a man who—

Metus omnes, et inexorabile fatum  
 Subjecit pedibus, strepitumque Acherontis avari.

The latter portrait, even if it be a fancy one, is the pleasanter one of the twain to contemplate, and it may be a real likeness ; If I had power in the matter, I should say, as the captain of a man of war says about twelve o’clock, ‘ Make it so.’

The opening scene of ‘The Tempest,’ as we all know, is full of bustle, ardour, and energy ; nay, it almost seems fraught with a tragic excitement ; for it is thus that Miranda describes its effect upon her own mind.

O ! I have suffered  
 With those that I saw suffer : a brave vessel,

Who had no doubt some noble creatures in her,  
Dashed all to pieces. O! the cry did knock  
Against my very heart. Poor souls ! they perish'd.  
Had I been any god of power, I would  
Have sunk the sea within the earth, or e'er  
It should the good ship so have swallow'd—and  
The fraughting souls within her.

Observe, by the way, the extreme delicacy of this remonstrance, as addressed to her father. His magical skill, quite capable of preserving ‘the good ship and all the fraughting souls within her,’ has remained (so at least she sadly believes) indifferent and inert. And yet, she does not say bluntly, ‘had I been a magician such as you are;’ this would have been too much like a direct reproach ; but, ‘had I been any god of power:’ He may take the hint for the future (it was indeed uncalled for), and yet feel that her filial tenderness and delicate affection have no spot or blemish upon them.

Miranda thinks, no doubt, that all the crew have perished ; but we know better. Shakspeare has not sketched out, in such vivid outlines, Gonzalo, the Boatswain, and the rest, only to drown them in our sight, before his Play has well begun , We feel certain, therefore, that our acquaintance with them, however apparently interrupted, will not be extinguished by the shipwreck.

De Quincey’s elder brother, it is true, when a school-boy, composed a most appalling tragedy—‘Amurath the Sultan.’ In that bloodstained composition the misbelieving monarch was so liberal of the bowstring, the poison-cup, and the axe, that, at the end of the first act, the unsparing Padishah, whether he called it peace or not, had made a solitude, and but for the author’s unquenchable activity of mind, the Play must have stopped, and the money paid (supposing there had been any money paid) been returned at the doors. The fifth form boy, however, was equal to the occasion, though the same difficulty presented itself again and again ; five times did he reconstruct

his subordinate characters, five times did he pour in reinforcements for the gibbet and the rack, till at length the curtain fell, at the time when it was bound to fall, upon that sullen tyrant, wearied out, but still unsatisfied, with his unending executions.

Shakspere, however, when he wrote ‘The Tempest’ was older, possibly also wiser, than the dramatist in question ; and as his characters were worth more than those of young De Quincey, he could not afford to throw them away in such reckless profusion. The storm, however, though not carrying death upon its wings, is set before us, in all its terrors, with great picturesqueness and life. The courtiers lose their temper the moment they see their danger, and vex the unfortunate sailors with idle talk ; These sailors appear to behave perfectly well ; even the Boatswain, the best abused man among them, commits no fault, in our presence, to justify the violence of his assailants : He seems to lack neither spirit nor resource, encouraging his men to the last, and throwing himself heart and soul into his necessary duties.

Sebastian and Antonio, selfish unprincipled men, give way to vulgar fury, because immediate danger strips off the outer coating of varnish—the superficial good-breeding, which belongs to the habits of their station, not really to themselves.

Even Gonzalo, the worthy old Gonzalo, is too hard upon the Boatswain, though he redeems his injustice by his humour. His dry fun, with his doom staring him in the face, is a good example of what we often hear of ‘the ruling passion strong in death.’

I have great comfort from this fellow. Methinks he hath no drowning mark upon him—his complexion is perfect gallows. Stand fast, good Fate, to his hanging : make the rope of his destiny our cable, for our own doth little advantage us. If he be not born to be hanged, then is our case miserable.

The Boatswain again, when he tells his passengers, ‘Hence ! you mar our labours, you do assist the storm,’ shows more

temper and manhood than the usurping Duke, or the treacherous Prince. Again, when they begin to scream and bewail themselves, his natural anger is not rougher than seems becoming to an old salt—so that our sympathies are with him and his crew, not with the useless and obtrusive noblemen.

The second scene is perhaps the most important in the Play. The narration of Prospero, beginning with this assurance, ‘That there is not so much perdition as a hair betid to any creature in the vessel,’ then proceeds to lay the foundations of the whole plot, by revealing to his daughter the secret of her birth, and by unfolding the long history of his misfortunes. This scene is written (if we may so say of Shakspere) with very great care. The ‘native woodnotes wild’ here blend together in a combination of the highest poetical genius and the highest dramatic art. In it, moreover, we are introduced to Miranda and Ariel : Now Miranda and Ariel, in the exquisite fineness of conception and perfect truth of keeping which distinguish them, are two of the most original characters in Shakspere : Caliban also, however much he stands opposed in other respects, has with them this merit in common. Puck, in the ‘Midsummer Night’s Dream,’ admirably delineated though he may be, grows more naturally out of the common superstitions of the time, and is more akin to the traditional elf; but Ariel, though like him a sylph of Ether, stands apart and alone. Without true human feelings, he possesses, in the place of conscience, a guiding idea of beauty and harmony—making that the central principle of his life ; to him vice is ugly and discordant ; mere ugliness and discord he hates, therefore he pinches Caliban with right good-will, and rejoices to mislead Stephano and Trinculo, repulsive to him on account of their coarse animal natures, into the stinking pool : Therefore he was too delicate a spirit to obey ‘the earthy and abhorred behests’ of Sycorax : Therefore, when the question arises, whether Prospero’s affections are to become tender to his

enemies, he discerns that grace and beauty, and something akin to those ethereal melodies wherein he delights, will result from this glorious effort of Christian forgiveness. Accordingly he replies without hesitation, ‘ Mine would, Sir, were they human.’ How grandly Prospero answers, we all know.

And mine shall.—

Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling  
Of their afflictions? and shall not myself,  
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply  
Passion as they, be kindlier moved than thou art?

Ariel, moreover, for whom his instincts towards Nature, in accordance with the inner harmonies of his being, are the whole of existence, differs from Puck in this also—that he is a solitary, not a gregarious spirit. He conveys instructions, no doubt, to his subordinate fellow-servants ; but is never seen to associate with them for any purpose of his own : This being so, when he has accomplished his final task, and given to the king’s ship

Calm seas—auspicious gales ;  
And sail so expeditious, that shall catch  
Your royal fleet far off,

Prospero lets him go—not to return in the fresh fire of his well-earned freedom, to old sylph-like friendships, or loves ; but to the elements—To mingle with them, and drink in life rejoicingly, from the sun, the sea, the clouds, and the ether, without other companionship than that derived from the soul of Nature herself, such is the destiny reserved for him—

Merrily, merrily, shall I live now,  
Under the blossom that hangs from the bough.

In speaking of Miranda, as in speaking of Ariel, it is difficult not to repeat in substance, if not in actual words, what others have thought and said before our time. We can only echo back Alexis Piron’s mad poet in the ‘Métromane.’ All that our predecessors in that respect have achieved are but

Des vols qu’ils nous ont fait d’avance ;

Overshadowed by these illustrious thieves, I wish I could go on with Piron's hero—

Faisons comme eux,  
Ils nous ont dérobés, dérobons nos neveux ;  
Et tarissant la source où puise un beau délire,  
A la Postérité ne laissons rien à dire.

Not, however, having sufficient confidence in my powers of literary felony, to give me hopes of stealing what is not yet before us to steal, I must be content to walk more humbly, and to glean what I can out of the reappings of the past. Now, in looking at Miranda and her exquisite sisters, Perdita, Imogen, Desdemona, and the rest, there is one thing of which Englishwomen may well be proud ; and that is their consciousness how our greatest Englishman has appreciated and described them.

*Laudari a laudato viro* has always been looked upon as one of the tests of successful excellence ; and it is something for a woman to know, that when Shakspere, with his intuitive and infinite knowledge of human nature, turned himself to delineate her sex, the outlines that naturally mirrored themselves upon his mind, in order that his poet-pen might turn them to shapes, were of such divine and unapproachable loveliness.

Miranda is a high-born lady, educated, as we cannot doubt, by her princely father, in all the accomplishments and graces of the time ; but, as far as knowledge of the world goes, or of any of those conventional habits that, during the long centuries since Eve, have been growing into fashion, she is as ignorant as Eve herself in the garden of Eden : She has not even learnt that a woman should be sought before she is won : And, therefore, she surrenders her maiden affections to Ferdinand with a simplicity, and discloses her love with a frankness, that nothing could reconcile us to, except an almost superhuman delicacy of touch on the part of the poet. We *are*, however, reconciled to this disclosure, and sympathise with the noble virgin, because we

are made to feel that it is out of the purity and crystal clearness of her mind, not out of any forwardness of temper, that these self-revelations come. Amidst all the surrounding circumstances, the attraction to Ferdinand, as to something hitherto unknown, yet beautiful and full of a subtle charm, was, from the delightful unconsciousness and spontaneity of her whole nature, absolutely inevitable. Miranda, perhaps, must be placed at the head of that company of fair women with whom Shakspere has enriched all time : There is certainly more inventive and constructive power shown in creating and delineating her than in creating and delineating any of the others. The one most akin to her is Perdita, in the 'Winter's Tale.' She also is a princess, ignorant of her birth, and brought up without the natural advantages of rank and station : Instead, however, of being separated by a great gulph from the commonplace struggles of life, Perdita is, as it were, lost and buried in the midst of them. Such, however, is her inborn grace, such the inherited refinement of her beauty, her character, her demeanour, that she outshines every rival, glittering through the clouds of her destiny 'like the morning star :' Surely we may go on with the quotation, 'Never lighted on this orb, which she hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision.' Indeed, Florizel's account of her dancing speaks for itself :—

When you do dance—I wish you  
A wave of the sea, that you might ever do  
Nothing but that ; move still—still, so,  
And own no other function.

This implies just the same charm in the lovely Shepherdess, as Burke found in the peerless Queen. We share in Florizel's enthusiasm, and agree that his chosen one is herself

A fairer flower  
Than any which Proserpina let fall  
From Dis's waggon—Daffodils,  
That come before the swallow dares, and take  
The winds of March with beauty, &c.

Perdita, however, is somewhat less tender and more self-reliant than Miranda. Affectionate as Prospero was, his mysterious communion with invisible spirits, his austere demeanour and habitual melancholy, must have awed into meditative gentleness and reserve the solitary virgin, in that solitary place. But Perdita, a born Queen, felt, from her cradle, an undoubted superiority to everything that surrounded her. No one, seeing her even for a moment, could fail to echo the praise of Polixenes :—

This is the prettiest love-born lass, that ever  
Ran on the greensward ; nothing she does, or seems,  
But smacks of something greater than herself,  
Too noble for her place.

Had the positions of the two girls been exchanged, Miranda would have hesitated more ere she entered into an engagement with the King's son ; whilst Prospero might have found in Perdita a sprightlier and bolder daughter, one who would have established, through their common love of music and flowers, a friendship with the delicate and melodious Ariel, whether Prospero liked it or not.

Perhaps, however, it would be better to say simply, that Perdita is of a more vivacious and enterprising temper than Miranda : For there seems to be in Shakspere's mind this idea, that between mortals and those elementary spirits over whom Prospero, by strange, if not by forbidden arts, exercises such unlimited power, a wall of separation naturally exists.

Ariel comes and goes, expostulates and submits, with Miranda apparently quite unconscious of his presence ; and, what is stranger, he apparently quite unconscious of hers. Indeed, when I say this idea possesses the mind of Shakspere, I need not confine myself to Shakspere. The common human instinct inclines, I think, to this belief: that it requires some special circumstance to remove a human being from the ordinary protection of God and nature, and to bridge over the

chasm sundering the embodied man from the bodiless spirit ;  
The normal state of both seems to be mutual exclusion.

A notion somewhat of this kind has passed, I think, through all history without interruption ; even from the blood-drinking ghosts of ‘The Odyssey,’ whereby the aspects of the dead, or as Homer poetically calls them, the out-wearied ones, regain a momentary life, thinking and feeling, as of old, till the momentary stimulus is exhausted ; down to our modern times ; down, we may say, to the *ειδωλον* of John Keate, who appeared, as we all know, not in his habit as he lived, but, under the image of a fair girl, with blue eyes and golden hair. He, however, no less than Anticlea, the mother of Odysseus, according to the theory here put forward, stands apart and inaccessible, except through traditional rites and sacrifices ; whereby alone an entrance into these dark places of the universe can be obtained. Now, so far from wishing to initiate Miranda into any of his secrets, or to smooth away the obstacles that intervened between her and the unearthly side of Nature, Prospero, I apprehend, has this one object before him : to educate her into the ideal perfection of womanliness : His flower that grew, *septis secretus in hortis*, was not to be shrivelled up by the harsh breath of an ungenial world; but, neither was it tempted to put forth strange blossoms, or to clothe itself with a preternatural flush of colour, beneath that magical atmosphere within which Prospero was working.

The island princess had to keep her virgin whiteness, as of a lily, and her saintly maidenhood, until she floated down—the gentlest of human angels—to her appointed place upon the throne of Naples. Therefore she was kept apart, as it seems, from all Prospero’s mysteries—to share with him the human portion of his life, never passing beyond it. We have no reason, that I can recall to myself, for thinking that she had ever seen a spirit. Though she might know generally her father’s practice

of employing magical arts, she was apparently not even conscious, as Caliban was, that

The isle was full of noises,  
Sounds, and sweet airs, that gave delight, and hurt not.

To explain this we must suppose either that Prospero meant Caliban to feel that his agents were ever close at hand, and therefore opened his eyes and ears to the influence of sorcery, whilst he kept Miranda far away out of its reach. Or else Caliban himself, as a demi-devil, had some inborn affinity with the phantasmal inhabitants of the place ; just as we find in the ‘Arabian Nights’ that Beder, though son to the orthodox King of Persia, derives from his mother, the Sea-Queen, all qualities and powers enabling him to live as the Sea-Kings live, safe and at home in the depths of the ocean.

In this manner Caliban, of himself and before Prospero landed on the coast, might have been familiar with the music and the visions of which he speaks, though a mere man, unless acted upon by a magician, would have seen and heard nothing. But that whilst Caliban, no matter how or why, was subject to these necromantic influences, Miranda was carefully shielded from them, may be gathered, I think, from the masque at the end of the play : Prospero, about to finish with all questionable arts, speaks thus :—

Go, bring the rabble,  
O'er whom I give thee power, here, to this place :  
Incite them to quick motion ; for I must  
Bestow upon the eyes of this *young couple*.  
Some vanity of my art ; it is my promise,  
And *they* expect it from me.

The young couple, as we see, rank together, and the whole fantastic exhibition is obviously a fresh delight and surprise to Miranda, exactly as it is to Ferdinand.

As for Caliban—mis-shapen monster as he is—he is yet not without some justification. There is something in his early speech that touches us, though I must admit that the first words are not sentimental :—

I must eat my dinner—  
This island's *mine*, by Sycorax, my mother.

When thou camest first,  
Thou strok'dst me, and made much of me ; would give me  
Water with berries in't ; and teach me how  
To name the bigger light, and how the less,  
That burn by day and night—and *then* I lov'd thee.

He speaks the truth—the island *was* his, and he finds himself deprived of it, and reduced to abject slavery, by one, upon whom he had lavished his uncouth gratitude and half-human affection. We feel, as he felt with his struggling and purblind reason, that Prospero had no business to apply the rules and language of civilised society in his intercourse with so crude and undeveloped a creature. Putting aside his demon parentage altogether, had he been only a deserted child of Adam—a mere wild man, with nothing but his sensations and instincts to teach him—he would, according to his dim insight into the mysteries of right and wrong, have done no evil. Prospero might justly, perhaps, have used his power to place Caliban on some other island ; He might even, to adopt the received euphemism, have put him out of the way on the plea of necessity—as you destroy a wild beast ; but to punish him formally (besides lecturing him, in defiance of the well-known Negro protest), as if he were answerable to Archbold's 'Criminal Practice,' or the 'Code Napoleon,' is unfair, and the poor monster, with his infantine or dog-like sensibility to the stings of injustice, feels it to be unfair.

You shoot a tiger for pouncing, or to prevent him from pouncing, upon your pet heifer ; but it would be ridiculous to indict the said tiger for assaulting the said heifer with intent to cause her grievous bodily harm. Good heavens ! what a rushing evasion out of court there would be, in spite of fines and admonitions, if the said accused tiger could insist upon a jury *de medietate linguae*. Fancy six respectable London tradesmen

locked up with six Bengal tigers—locked up without meat, drink, fire, or candle—till they could agree upon a verdict. Fancy, the senior Bengal tiger coming into court next morning with a demure face, licking his lips, and praying a *tales*. Now I say of Caliban, as of the tiger, Prospero might, if he thought fit, have made him safe in death ; but he had no right to treat him as a responsible human culprit ; still less right had he to make his act of injustice profitable to himself by turning him into a slave —one forced to make the fire, fetch in wood, and perform all menial offices. Naturally, therefore, poor Caliban is furious, with all the fury of uneducated animal impulse, against Prospero, the man whom he had so loved. That this man, after pretending to treat him kindly, should take advantage of his first fault (a fault which Prospero might well have foreseen and guarded against)—should stye him into the hard rock, shut him out from all his accustomed pleasures and pursuits, vex him with necromantic tortures, and make use of him under pretence of punishment— pierces, as might be expected, the wretched savage to the heart. Caliban, as I have said, in point of moral sense is a child, with the child's power of indignation against anything that looks like injustice ; he has, moreover, whatever his bad qualities may be, a spirit of loyal affection that redeems everything. From this, and from the fact that his mind has been shaped by nature—by nature streaming in upon him through every pore—it results that, though brutal, he is never vulgar. There are no specimens of Shakspere's wonderful art more wonderful than the vivid, passionate imagery of Caliban's speeches, as they contrast themselves with the low wit of Trinculo, and the city-bred conceit of the drunken Butler. It is impossible not to sympathise with the poor bully monster, when he finds out for the second time how his intensely loyal affection is driven back upon himself, and exclaims in his angry repentance—

What a thrice double ass  
Was I, to take this drunkard for a god,  
And worship this dull fool !

Let us hope, that if Prospero did not choose to train him up, through his power of loving and hating, that he was, at least, set free to enjoy his hereditary kingdom, without any dread of being pinched to death, by the Magician's vassal spirits, after the Magician himself had left him alone.

One of Caliban's most remarkable qualities is the fearless candour and sincerity of his temper. He never stoops to flatter Prospero, or to disguise, through fear, the bitterness of his resentment;

You taught me language; and my profit on it  
Is, I know how to curse. The red plague rid you,  
For learning me your language !

And again, when under the pressure of terrible threats, he submits—it is simple submission, without any tendency to cringe to or fawn upon his tyrant;

No, prithee !  
I must obey: his art is of such power,  
It would control my dam's God, Setebos,  
And make a vassal of him.

Again, though he blames himself with perfect openness, for worshipping the foolish drunkard Stephano ; though he shows his natural good sense and the fairness of his understanding by making no excuses; we may, to a certain extent, plead his cause; We may, at least, say for him this much, that if Bacchus, who,

out of the grape,  
After the Tuscan mariners transformed,  
Crushed the sweet poison of misused wine ;—

If Bacchus, I say, founded upon that performance a just title to godhead among the intellectual Greeks, and was accordingly accepted by them as an orthodox deity at once; he

who invents for you a whole butt of Sherry, ready-made, without crushing grapes, or fermentation, or delay of any kind, ought, *& fortiori*, we think, to be held divine. Now this, for the poor monster, was Stephano's avatar upon the enchanted island; who can wonder then, if Caliban thought him a more potent magician than Prospero himself?

We, at any rate, cannot reproach him with this natural infatuation, since we owe to it those brilliant comic scenes between Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban, which are almost unequalled in their humorous perfection. Stephano's absurd assumption of dignity on the strength of his hoarded liquor; the admiring humbleness of his devoted slave, and Trinculo's pettish disgust, caused by pure jealousy, at the unexpected elevation of his fellow-servant—as specimens of the true *vis comica* must always delight us; whilst the marvellous skill with which the wild poetic nature of the untaught savage is brought into contact and contrasted with the vulgar hopes and fears of these mean underlings—the dregs and offscourings of a vicious civilisation—creates for us a series of dramatic pictures, alike admirable to study in the closet, or laugh at on the stage.

The character of Prospero is also wonderfully pourtrayed. Gentle, generous, and high-minded, he has yet been driven to perilous courses, if not to actual sin, in order to retrieve fallen fortunes, and draw his enemies together within the net of his power. It cannot be held an indifferent thing, that a Christian prince should, by the help of disembodied spirits, who, whatever else they may have been, certainly were not angels of light,

have bedimmed  
The noontide sun, called forth the mutinous winds,  
And 'twixt the green sea and the arm'd vault  
Set ruinous war.

Above all, that

graves, at his command,  
Should wake their sleepers, ope, and let them forth  
By his so potent art.

He abjures, indeed, this rough magic for the future, but he feels also that the mere fact of having once practised it, calls for a solemn expiation ; He contemplates, therefore, retiring to some hermitage in the neighbourhood of his own Milan, where he may spend all that remains to him of life in religious exercises—‘ Every third thought his grave.’

In the meantime, however, this rough magic and he have been struggling together, and we find in this fact a clue to the imperiousness of his temper, and the bitter severity of his rule. His harshness to Caliban, to Ariel, nay, to Ferdinand and Miranda, we must not suppose to be altogether assumed ; it is the indignation of one accustomed to wield irresistible power, at the first check to his will—the first hint of disobedience or delay.

A sorcerer, according to the well-understood laws of that profession, was forced to be a tyrant, and to rule his intractable vassals with a rod of iron. Caliban’s account, indeed, of their relations to Prospero—

They all do hate him,  
As rootedly as I—

may not be absolutely true ; The down-trodden savage looks at the matter through a mist of disappointed malevolence ; It contains, however, some truth. We gather from the sullenness of Ariel, his favourite minister, that these spirit-services were not willingly given, and that monarchy—absolute monarchy—watchful, suspicious, and unrelenting in punishment, is the only form of rule possible between Prospero and his dangerous satellites. Walter Scott tells us a story, how a persecuted Covenanting fugitive was offered by a mysterious personage (who met him in the wild solitude of the Cheviot Fells) the realm of broad Scotland, upon certain conditions ; These conditions were that he should assume (having in his own nature what such an assumption requires) the character of a magician ; This being done, he was to break the spell laid by the mighty wizard, Sir

Michael Scott, upon an immeasurable army of phantom warriors, lying from century to century in their enchanted slumbers underneath the hill.

The terror-stricken neophyte makes a wrong choice; instead of grasping the sword—the true sceptre over that phantom army—he puts white and trembling lips to a bugle, and perishes accordingly.

Now, the state of Prospero is so far unlike that of the half-hearted Puritan just disposed of, that it exhibits, on the other hand, a complete victory over vassal spirits, and puts him before us in the very act of wrestling successfully with principalities and powers ; But we must not, because of the triumph, make light of what he has to undergo.

Even success in such a struggle implies a mailed watchfulness, and an unsleeping caution, beyond the strength of any but the most exceptional men, and exhausting even to them. Prospero, therefore, though not one over whom the jubilant chorus of the spiritual rebels was ever likely to cry out, as in the case of the feeble-minded Scotchman—

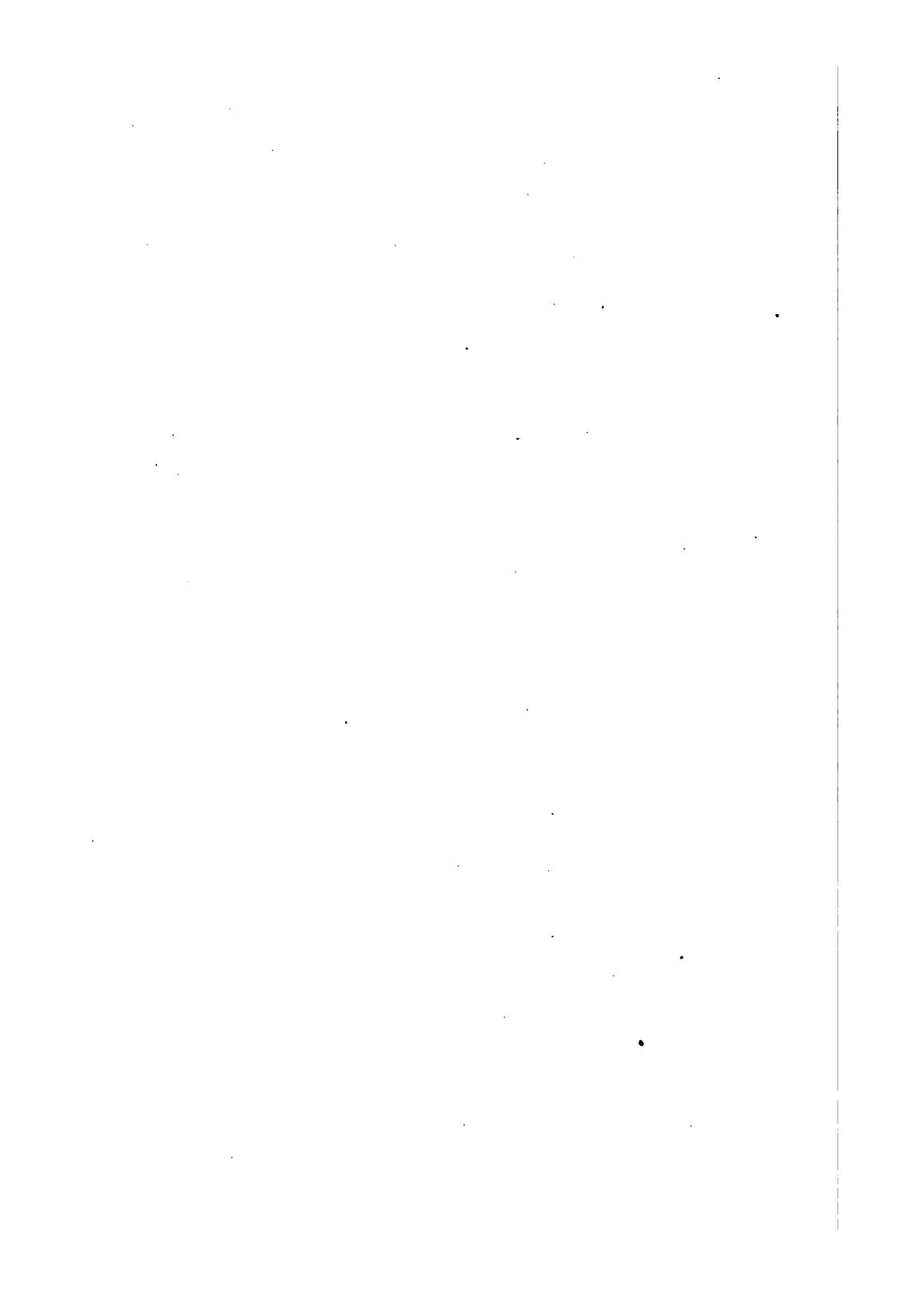
Woe to the coward that e'er he was born,  
Who did not draw the sword, before he blew the horn—

was none the more, on that account, out of the reach of danger. We know that, year after year, his sword must have been held out at arm's length, and the protecting circle of necromantic fires kept ever trimmed and alight ; lest his slaves, becoming masters in their turn, should rush in and tear the baffled sorcerer to pieces.

Hence the intense refreshment, always reanimating his heart, from the sweet human presence of Miranda, which came upon him like the gleam of cool fountains, or the shadows of a blossoming palm-tree in the desert land ; Hence, also, an additional reason, if it were needed, for keeping her as she was, pure from all mysterious knowledge, and untouched by the

magical interventions that were ever near her, and yet ever remote.

We gather also, why it was that, in spite of recovered prosperity, with happiness apparently at his feet, the deepest longing of his soul must have been, as it was, for absolute rest. He returns from his island to the world, not to mingle in the strife of men—not to use his art in acquiring wealth, or reaching at empire—but to turn away from the glare and pressure of life, so that he might meditate in silence and peace on the healing powers of repentance, and the gracious promises of God.



# INSTALLATION ODE

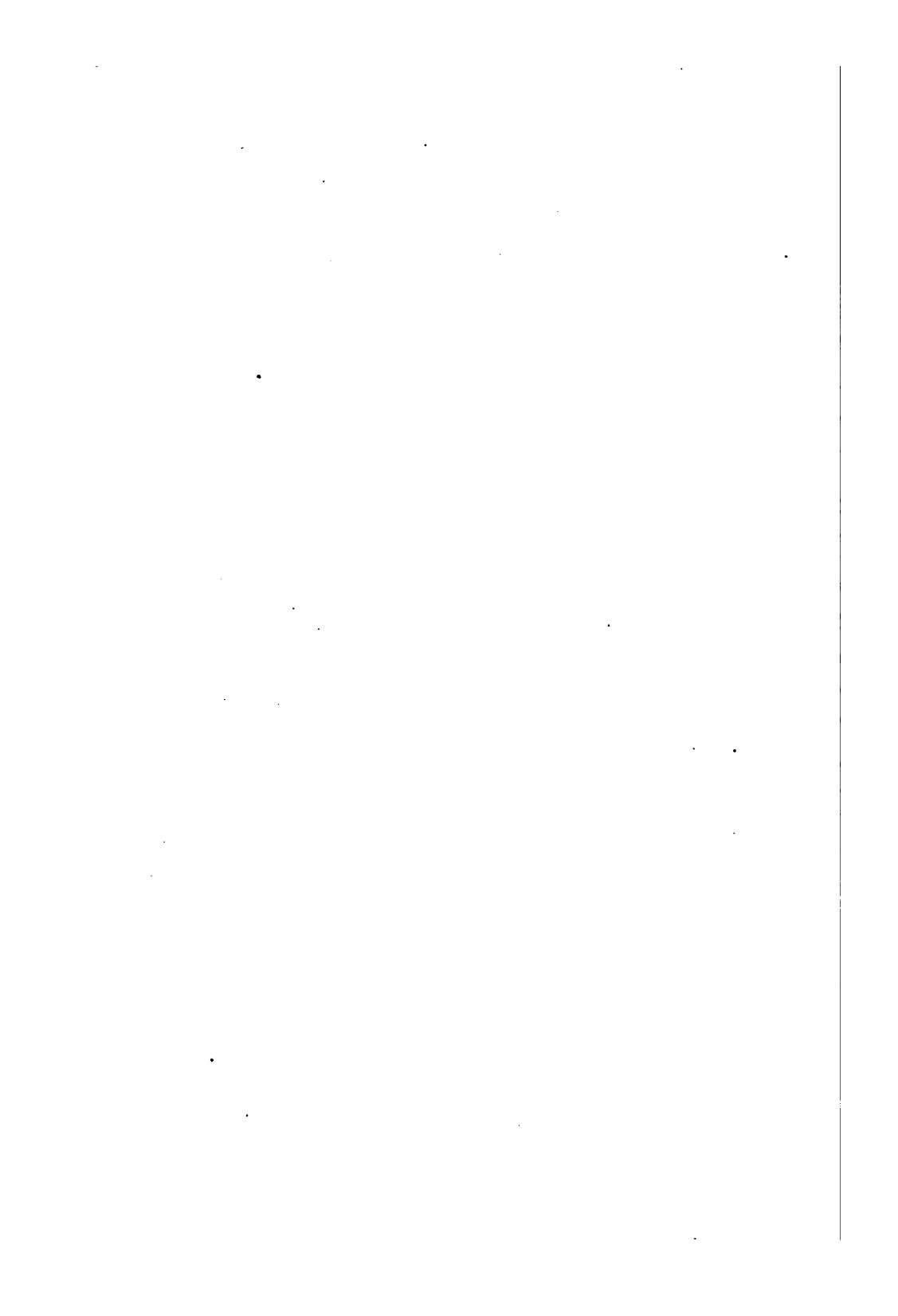
*WRITTEN FOR THE OXFORD COMMEMORATION OF 1870*

AND OTHER POEMS

BY

SIR FRANCIS HASTINGS DOYLE, BART.

PROFESSOR OF POETRY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



## ODE FOR MUSIC.

TO BE SUNG IN THE SHELDONIAN THEATRE, OXFORD,

*AT THE ENCAENIA, JUNE 1870*

ON THE FIRST VISIT OF THE MOST HON. THE MARQUIS OF SALISBURY, CHANCELLOR.

---

Now let us praise our famous men,  
With melodies, whose eager flight  
Throbs through the trembling air as light,  
With all that blended influence, when  
Sweet harp-like voices thrill around,  
Above the organ's thunder sound,  
Die faintly off, then soar again :  
So let us praise our famous men.

As lulled by each mysterious note,  
On vanished hopes and hours we dwell,  
Low murmurs through the music float,  
As of some murmuring ocean shell.  
From the pale distance of the dead  
A faint breath wavers to and fro,  
Like unforgotten fragrance shed  
On May morns long ago.

Oxford, full many a child of thine,  
We yearn for now with hearts forlorn,  
Who poured away fresh youth, like wine,  
And sunk, with noble toils outworn.

*ODE FOR MUSIC.*

Unchanging now, by day or night,  
 Before these dim and aged eyes,  
 For ever young, for ever bright,  
 Our early lost arise.

Herbert, the loved of all, whose smile  
 Upon each memory lingers yet,  
 Like sun-light, hovering for a while  
 After the sun himself hath set.  
 Elgin, who held his life alway  
 A thing to spend for England's use ;  
 Who left in death another ray  
 Round the proud name of Bruce.

Lewis, the calm and just ; he too,  
 Through Fate's dark void has passed afar,  
 Unselfish, loyal, wise, and true,  
 And stainless ever as a star.  
 Last that great sire's great son,<sup>1</sup> who when  
 The steams of blood choked Indian air,  
 And fear made others cruel, then  
 Rose strong enough to spare.

Now full of hope, though sad, we meet  
 The silent place of one to fill ;  
 Whose knightly heart has ceased to beat,  
 Whose silver voice for earth is still ;  
 Our Derby, to new work gone forth,  
 We here must honour as we can :  
 But grateful toilers of the North<sup>2</sup>  
 Praise best that famous man.

<sup>1</sup> Lord Canning.

<sup>2</sup> Alluding to the late Lord Derby's exertions during the Lancashire cotton famine.

Hard is the task for those who seek  
A coming age to shape, like thee ;  
Still, Cecil, if the soul grow weak,  
Look back, look back, in faith, and see  
How amid threatening clouds, which hung  
Erewhile around each honoured name,  
On the storm's very heart were flung  
The rainbow lights of fame.

In these uncertain hours, when gloom  
Walls the weird Future from our eyes,  
And Time, before his wavering loom,  
Steeps the dim thread in sullen dyes ;  
Although for us, harsh Fate may will  
To blight the years not yet unrolled ;  
Nor man, nor God, hath power to kill  
The hero-work of old.

The fathers of our ancient race,  
Together—not their chiefs alone—  
Strong, each in his appointed place,  
Have made a matchless Past our own ;  
Must these proud memories fail and sink,  
Like white sparks flashing on the shore ?  
Or will God's hand shine out, and link  
Heart unto heart once more ?

When Spain's insulting keels essayed  
To crush the soul of our wild sea,  
Even as her brooding power had weighed  
Upon the spirits of the free ;  
Time tells us how the people rose,  
Like tides, onsweeping in their flow.  
To lift the great as foam, that shows  
An ocean's strength below.

Then moved thy sire, in light above  
The mighty wave of England's heart :  
One with it—resting on its love ;  
Too wise to dream of life apart.  
Danger frowns near, and must be met ;  
We may be called to front again  
A tyranny more baleful yet,  
A deadlier foe, than Spain.

The stealthy tread of hate and greed,  
How it creeps on half heard, we feel ;  
Yet trifle still, and take no heed  
Of smilers whetting hidden steel.  
When the war leaps on us at length,  
From silence, and without a sign ;  
To whom should England turn for strength,  
If not to Burleigh's line ?

He, 'gainst the rush of peril, showed  
Fresh courage as the foe drew nigher,  
And fused men's thoughts, until they glowed,  
Like one great breath of living fire.  
Seek thou, as he sought, to uplift  
To her old height our English soul ;  
To heal each wound, to close each rift,  
To make our armour whole.

So shalt thou face the struggle stern,  
That lies before thee on thy way ;  
And victor thus, or vanquished, earn  
A wreath more lasting than the bay.  
So shalt thou find that other feet  
Tread other paths, to the same end ;  
And under one high influence, greet  
Each true man as a friend.

To sow, for years remote, the seed  
     Of knowledge—soothe intestine strife ;  
 To cheer the land with hope, to feed,  
     And guide, not quench, the fires of life ;  
 To serve untired, whate'er befall,  
     To save, renew, create, unfold ;  
 Is not this work that claimeth all ?  
     For wise the words of old ;

Easy, indeed, to shake a state ;<sup>1</sup>  
     That much at least may do  
 Some slight and worthless man, but great  
     And tasking wrestlers' limbs, the feat  
 To fix her in her former state,  
     And build the whole anew.

Yea, tasking sinew, brain, and soul,  
     From harm the ancient fane to keep,  
 Whilst overhead harsh thunders roll,  
     And outbursts billowing from below,  
 The deepset earth whirl to and fro.

The dead have done their work, they sleep,  
     Safe from all chance of ill ;  
 But yet, unfaltering in its flight,  
     From their cold hands with fiery leap,  
 Before the breath of God's high will,  
     The torch of Fate right onward runs,  
         And England calls her living sons,  
 Ere they are left alone with night,  
     To grasp and raise that quenchless light.

She calls on each with ill to cope,  
     Mailed in bright aims and self-less hope,

<sup>1</sup> Pindar, 4th Pythian.

To thrust all meaner lusts aside,  
And love his country as a bride ;  
So all the good, for her dear sake,  
    Close joining hand to hand,  
Shall of one glorious toil partake,  
    Till peace hath filled the land.

Hence, whilst we praise our famous men,  
    With melodies, whose eager flight  
        Throbs through the living air, as light,  
With all that music lendeth, when  
    Sweet harp-like voices thrill around,  
        Above the organ's thundér-sound,  
        Dreamlike die off, then soar again—  
    Thy name shall sound among them then.

## NEAMET AND NOAM.

FOUNDED ON ONE OF THE MINOR STORIES IN LANE'S  
ARABIAN NIGHTS.

### PART I.

WHERE swift Euphrates, full of life, as when  
Nimrod towered high above the sons of men,  
Sweeps past his tamarisks and willows, round  
Forgotten tombs, and many a haunted mound,  
Cufa the Moslem city stood ; of old  
By zealous Omar planted to uphold  
Whate'er the Prophet taught, that more and more  
Wise men might build up knowledge, and explore,  
With Faith still growing into perfect sight,  
Mysterious depths of God's unfathomed light.

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There, among many names to honour known,  
On loving lips one lingered, one alone ;  
Wealthy, and wise, and kind, of noble race,  
Hatim the Good was ever first in place.  
E'en she whose evil eye strikes at the great,  
Pale Envy, grudged him not his prosperous fate ;  
E'en the fierce viceroy masked in smiles his silent hate.

Yet though his life as happy men may greet,  
For whom on earth is happiness complete ?

Shades of old sorrow kept his palace chill,  
 Old wounds, unhealed by Time, were bleeding still.  
 A troop of bright-eyed striplings should have ridden,  
 And romped about his bridle-rein unchidden ;  
 A laughing band of gentle daughters prest  
 Close to his side, and sung him into rest.  
 But Allah willed it not : when she who bore  
 His child, died in her prime, he sought no more  
 The love of women ; his whole heart was set  
 Upon that child—the youthful Neamet.  
 And well a father's eye might rest with pride  
 On that wild boy, deep-haired and purple-eyed,  
 When through the glades he flashed like light, and went  
 Exulting in his airy merriment—  
 Full of sweet hope, like a bloom-crowded tree,  
 And beautiful as sunrise o'er the sea ;  
 For not till then had Nature toiled to give  
 Such wondrous charms to aught about to live,  
 Nor poet's thought, nor art's divine endeavour  
 Enriched the world with such a vision—never  
 Has Phidian shape or dream of Raphael  
 Embodied childhood's heavenly grace as well ;  
 So that where'er he passed in brightness, Love,  
 Like his own shadow, with him seemed to move,  
 And blessings, from all hearts about him shed,  
 Lay like spring-dews upon that flower-like head.

Oft on his couch, just ere the day-break, laid,  
 When stars grow large and white before they fade,  
 Thrice happy thus to wake, in tender joy  
 Hatim lay musing on that peerless boy,  
 Till glowed the years to be with rapture, drawn  
 From fountains brighter than that coming dawn.  
 Oft said he (when like some far river's flow  
 These dreams of bliss within were murmuring low),

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‘ Riches I ask not—riches now are mine ;  
 I ask no daughter of a royal line  
 To welcome on our knees ; enough for me  
 If one as bright in loveliness there be  
 By Allah sent to share his destiny.  
 What though for him no wealthy foreign scold,  
 Hard as her gems, and yellow as her gold      60  
 (A barren heiress, a mere name of wife),  
 Sit sullen at the board, discolouring life ;  
 Nor yet some haughty maid, to kings allied,  
 Invade the house, a tyrant, not a bride.  
 Still, if divinely granted to our prayer,  
 A mate be found, gracious, and wise, and fair,  
 Outshining other maids and dowered like him  
 With powers to make all rival beauty dim ;  
 If on our hearth, when these young lives unite,  
 Float down from heaven a blessing and a light,      70  
 This rude earth, touched and warmed by their soft eyes,  
 May blossom as with flowers from Paradise,  
 And Hatim’s house, a fire that shines apart,  
 Be known as holding empire o’er the heart,  
 Known by that gift of God through regions wide,  
 As a fair shrine to beauty sanctified :  
 And thus enriched and graced may well contemn  
 The Caliph’s, or the Sultan’s diadem—  
 May well from such a glorious height look down  
 On the White Czar who threatens Othman’s crown.’      80

By such thoughts led, when Spring, through fluttering  
 showers,  
 With her gay voice broke on the dream of flowers,  
 When, underneath the flushing almond trees,  
 The splendour of the bright anemones<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This district of Asia, as Mr. Lane informs us, was called ‘Anthe-

Ran, like a scarlet flame along the ground,  
 Up to the white rose thickets gleaming round,  
 Through the clear lights of morning Hatim went,  
 Urged onward by some deep presentiment ;  
 It seemed as if a hidden spirit still  
 Moved with his pulse, and quenched all human will, 90  
 For breaths of strange emotion on him fell,  
 Rapid as lightning, irresistible.  
 Like one who walks in charmèd sleep alone,  
 Following some hand of power through ways unknown,  
 Into the ancient market-place hard by  
 He passed, nor knew he how, nor knew he why.  
 There slaves from every land, of every hue,  
 In ordered files were ranked for public view.  
 Ionian girls, with glance of liquid jet,  
 Half-fire, half softened by some fond regret, 100  
 And fragrant tresses darker than the violet ;  
 Proud Gothic captives, golden-haired and slim,  
 Frowned near, amid a knot of Nubians grim ;  
 Next whom in stately beauty, tall and fair,  
 Caucasian youths and virgins gathered there,  
 Bright with new hopes, and fresh from mountain air.  
 Here, dragged by pirates o'er the wild sea-foam,  
 With deep blue eyes yet weeping for her home  
 Beside Halzaphron's cliff, a British maid ;  
 Close to her from the lion-haunted glade 110  
 Through which Tacazze rolls his roaring flood,  
 Slight, graceful women of Amharic blood,  
 Just free from the fierce Arab's cramping chain,  
 Moved their lithe limbs, and rose erect again.

musia,' or 'The Flowery Land,' by the Greeks. It is still remarkable for its flowers, more especially for an abundance of white roses.

<sup>1</sup> I have kept this one line as a protest against the foolish theory, that the *caesura* in the Alexandrine *must* be on the sixth syllable. I altered others in deference to friendly criticism because the matter was not worth contesting.

These one and all Hatim regarded not,  
 Drawn onward, onward to the appointed spot ;  
 Where, shrinking from the tumult and the press,  
 A woman stood, dark, pale, and motionless.  
 Well might we weep for her—weep to behold  
 One brought so low, that was so great of old—  
 If hers were now the story to be told ;  
 But life for her, burnt into darkness blind  
 As a spent fire, lay choked and dead behind.  
 That wasted form drooped feeble and forlorn,  
 Like the moon waning in a winter morn,  
 And o'er her beauty, once a world's delight,  
 The stain of grief spread like a clinging blight,  
 So that men came and went with heedless eye,  
 And Hatim, like the rest, had wandered by,  
 But that before him, clinging to her side,  
 Shone like the morning star, that hoped-for bride.  
 Scarce five years old she seemed, of beauty rare,  
 Matching that lovely boy—beyond expression fair ;  
 So looked, we well might deem, that mystic child  
 By Helen's phantom from her nurse beguiled,  
 Whose wondrous legend in the days of old,  
 With bated breath each Dorian mother told,  
 O'er that unconquered land of proud renown,  
 Where, from Boreum's cliff, flung sparkling down  
 Through his massed oleander blooms, that quiver  
 With double life, glassed on the shining river  
 In rose-hued curves, beneath a southern sun,  
 The limpid waters of Eurotas run—  
 Yes ! in Laconia's mountain-guarded vale,  
 Each maiden heard delightedly the tale,  
 How when a Spartan girl was doomed to lie  
 On grim Taygetus, and there to die,

<sup>1</sup> For the story of Ariston's wife here referred to, *vide* Herodotus, Book vi. ch. lxi.

Lest her foul features should bring down disgrace  
 On a stern sire, and mar his ancient race ;  
 As by a faithful slave, beyond the throng      150  
 Of jeering chiefs, the babe was borne along,  
 A stately woman, not of mortal birth,  
 Silently rose out of the sacred earth,  
 Smote numb that nurse, with one imperial look,  
 Then from her powerless arms the infant took ;  
 To be restored when each harsh human line  
 Was changed to beauty, under love divine ;  
 Whilst all that marred her form was lifted then,  
 As a vile mask, not to be worn again ;  
 And radiance from within was round her thrown,      160  
 Like the gleams flushing through an opal stone.  
 Such seemed this heaven-sent maid—as if from far  
 She had been touched by some empyrean star  
 Kindling unearthly charms. Why need I say  
 That Hatim bore her from the mart away ?  
 Whilst the wan mother, slowly reconciled  
 To life that dawned in brightness for her child,  
 Became less sad, yea, smiled at times to see  
 Those fair young things laugh in their tameless glee ?  
 All know how fast on to Death's shoreless deep      170  
 The unending tides of life's great river sweep—  
 How childhood merges into youth, and so  
 Man's ages into one another flow ;  
 Enough to say, that as the years went by  
 These children bloomed in bright tranquillity—  
 That Neamet, with fearless grace, would rein  
 The wildest war-horse in his father's train ;  
 That, when her song throbbed through the flowering dales,  
 Amid the silence of the nightingales,  
 Fair Noam's lute and lay all hearts could thrill,      180  
 As if touched by the angel Israfil.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The great musician among the Mahometan angels.

The boy, though full of joyous youth, and strong  
O'er rough and smooth to urge the chase along—  
Though wild, as haggard falcon in her flight,  
He ever sought on danger's edge delight ;  
Would for an asking look all sport forego,  
Fling down the spear, unstring his favourite bow,  
To lie beneath the light of those sweet eyes,  
Whilst the moon stole into the deepening skies ;  
And twine amid her raven curls the red      190  
Pomegranate blossoms that grew over-head :  
Careless, though hounds and eager vassals wait  
Round his white Arab, snorting at the gate.  
Thus side by side, and hand in hand, the two  
Linked like a double star, in beauty grew.  
O'er the bright flowers, and under echoing trees  
Their welcome laughter rippled as a breeze,  
Till childhood passing swift through cloudless days,  
Melted behind them to a golden haze ;  
And, spreading its sweet leaves from hour to hour,      200  
Their bud of love became a living flower.  
Thus all men watched them—lovers without guile—  
And read their open secret with a smile—  
Read and rejoiced, in looks so fresh and gay,  
As men rejoice to greet a blithe spring day,  
Till Hatim, gladdened by the general joy,  
Betrothed with solemn rites the girl and boy—  
That boy, the gem of Cufa's youth ; that girl  
Of Cufa's maidenhood the flawless pearl.

Whilst thus in Hatim's house reigned mirth and love,      210  
Far other passions the fierce Viceroy move.  
Hardened he was, and one without remorse,  
Who passed from force to fraud, from fraud to force ;  
Keen still to keep his evil powers secure,  
He bribed the great, and then oppressed the poor.

Long had he raised himself above the laws,  
Giving his cruel will the rein, because  
An aged monarch, dozing in his hall,  
Had almost let the golden sceptre fall.  
But to that weary heart death brought release,      220  
So with his fathers slept the King in peace:  
And now a youthful prince, who sought renown  
By justice to his people, wore the crown;  
Whilst the sleek flatterers who had basely sold—  
Blinding their lord—the lives of men for gold,  
Trembled themselves, and scarce had strength to send  
Faint messages, warning each ruthless friend,  
Still, somehow, in the Viceroy's startled ear,  
These words of warning sounded low but clear:  
'The taint of blood, from thy far province blown,      230  
Creeps mist-like onward, and infects the throne ;  
Low cries of women and of children beat  
Like wailing winds upon the judgment-seat.  
In the old days we may have been as thou,  
And let our passions have their way; but now  
Perforce we are reformed; devoutly bent,  
Like echoes to the Caliph we assent,  
Thy name the burthen is of our lament.  
Thy long career of what we now call crime,  
For vengeance marks thee out—be wise in time !'      240  
'Enough,' he thought ; 'though Fortune flout me thus,  
Yet is the Caliph young and amorous;  
A lion in the net will strive in vain,  
To bind this lion we have beauty's chain.  
Noam's sweet eyes and angel voice must fill  
His heart with dreams, relax that iron will,  
And drain all purpose from his heart, until,  
Whilst the fresh hours their fresh allurements bring,  
He shrink and dwindle to a common king.'

Fair Noam must be mine, and his through me ;  
Yet is there need of night and secrecy.  
That house in wealth, in friends, in arms is strong,  
We may not venture upon open wrong—  
Though swift, we must be patient, even as Fate,  
They garner all who know but how to wait'

From that day forth he coiled his wiles around  
Her gentle life ; without a sign or sound  
He overhung her careless steps, and knew  
All she had done, and all she hoped to do :  
Her comings and her goings watched, but she  
Heeded no more than laughing infancy.      260  
So the fierce python, floating in his wrath  
From tree to tree above the forest path,  
By which their way all trembling creatures take,  
At night, to some clear stream or shining lake,  
Through the thick leafage shoots his baleful slope  
Down on an unsuspecting antelope,  
Tightening his nets of death, ring over ring,  
Around that innocent and lovely thing.

Still, help he needed to prepare the way—      270  
Help to decoy his victim, and betray ;  
But well man's heart he knew, and looking round,  
Among the falsely good his tool he found.

There was a woman, old, and worn, and white,  
Loud in her prayers by day, and loud by night ;  
Austere of life and speech, by fasting grown  
A ghastly hide stretched over nerve and bone.  
Yet though behung with rosaries and beads,  
She drawled her chapters out, and chanted creeds—  
Though God's name, ever-wise and ever-great,      280  
Sat on her bloodless lips, early and late,

This seeming saint was but a living lie,  
 Greedy and base, a tool for gold to buy.  
 She asked a month to lure away the maid:  
 ‘Expect me then, and her with me,’ she said ;  
 And in that month, from dawn throughout the day,  
 At Noam’s door she prayed, or feigned to pray,  
 Till that bright creature, easy of access,  
 Revered her life, and pitied her distress—  
 Relieved her, loved her, trusted her, and deemed      290  
 That she was even holier than she seemed—  
 So holy that no evil could come near  
 One to the Prophet, yea, to God, so dear.  
 Whilst Neamet, contemptuously kind,  
 With love, and hope, and youthful ardour blind,  
 Although he loathed the crone, yet heeded not ;  
 Though his heart warned him often, he forgot  
 How instinct, surer than all thought, shrinks more  
 From the asp hissing than the lion’s roar.  
 Soon then, it chanced that in her simple way,      300  
 Young Noam from her house was led astray ;  
 Some vain pretext there was of things divine—  
 To hear how holy men pray round their shrine,  
 Some mosque to view, some blessing to obtain,  
 She went undoubting forth—nor came again.

Alas for Neamet ! who that day stood  
 Far from her in the forest solitude  
 With Syrian weapons armed ; from sunrise there  
 He tracked the mother-wolf home to her lair ;  
 Or, having tamed and trained his mighty horse,      310  
 Till it became a mere mechanic force,  
 Flung that fierce steed, as men a javelin fling,  
 To meet the wounded panther in her spring.

Yet, amid all the pleasure and the pride—  
The wild emotions that the chase supplied,  
The hard-won triumph, and the daring ride—  
An unseen presence seemed his heart to fill,  
Low whispers muttered of some coming ill ;  
And over all the rising floods of bloom  
There fell, he thought, a shadow and a gloom,  
Darkening the mid-day sun, so that for him,  
Without a cloud, the bright blue sky grew dim.

320

Alas for Neamet, when he returned !  
No lamp within his lady's window burned.  
By a sad restlessness disquieted  
The household servants moved and murmurèd ;  
As, when on summer summer storms are thrown,  
The tree-tops of the forest toss and moan ;  
With stammering lips, bowed heads, and faces pale,  
They falter forth their version of the tale.

33°

Alas for Noam, from her lover torn !  
Alas for Neamet, left there to mourn !  
All day he rested not, but sought and sought—  
The eve no peace, the night no slumber brought ;  
One feeling never slackened its rush of pain,  
But like the sea, beat round his wavering brain.  
Or if he slept, he felt dim sorrow press,  
And moved, bewildered and companionless,  
He knew not why, through some grey wilderness ;  
Then waking with a start, across his soul  
Yet doubting, mists of gloomy wonder roll,  
Till straight the piercing shafts of memory flew,  
And poisoned wounds within began to burn anew.  
So was he racked ; but soon delirium came,  
And fever parched him, withering like a flame.

34°

Then all men gave him up to death, except  
 His father, who still wrestled, prayed, and wept—  
 Wrestled with God convulsively, and poured  
 Mind, heart, and spirit out before the Lord !

At that dread moment, in the halls below.

350

A sudden step was heard to live and grow ;  
 The gates, untouched, their folds wide open spread,  
 The whole house throbbed to that mysterious tread,  
 And, in strange garb, there shone within the door  
 A stately presence never seen before.

As drifted snows his hair and beard were white,  
 His eye gleamed full of wild, yet solemn light,  
 Across his massive forehead lines were wrought,  
 That spake of years of strife and years of thought ;  
 Yet like a granite headland in its place,

360

Against whose scorning front, and steadfast base,  
 The bitter hatred of the maddened main  
 Flings itself, raging ever, but in vain,

Through his long struggles, worn but unsubdued  
 By warfare more than human, firm he stood !

They guessed him soon to be that Median sage,  
 Whose deeds were knewn, unknown his name or age ;  
 Some whispered, that, before the Prophet's birth,  
 He had foretold that gift of heaven to earth,

That, still unchanged, whilst on the slow years rolled, 370  
 Clad in the heirship of enchantments old

From Kingly Magian priests, he dwelt apart

To worship, and all-powerful in his art,

Won by no compact, serving foul desire,

But through consuming thought, and zeal like fire,

He ruled dark spirits with an iron rod,

And bade them toil to do the work of God.

We cannot tell if these wild tales be true,

But yet strange gifts were his; full well he knew

The secret virtue of all herbs that grew;

380

Heard often, when no earthly sound was there,  
 Oracular voices on the midnight air ;  
 Or felt, through heaven's great silence, from afar  
 The music floating round each ancient star.

With gracious looks on stepped that aged man,  
 And thus to speak in solemn tones began :  
 'Nay, tremble not my friends, ye need not fear,  
 For not without a warrant am I here ;  
 To save thy son from death, thee from despair,  
 I come, for great the strength and life of prayer !      390  
 Thine hath availed thee much ; not Solomon  
 In all his treasury of spells had one  
 Of half the strength to master and compel  
 The struggling powers of earth, and air, and hell ;  
 That word of thine, with faith and passion blent,  
 By God's acceptance armed, to me was sent—  
 To me, whom now He deigns to make His instrument—  
 And on its silent wing have I been borne  
 From distant hills beneath the earliest morn.  
 Rise Hatim, rise, and lead me to thy son,      400  
 For now or never must this task be done !'  
 He went, and raised that form so faint, so frail ;  
 Kissed the dry lips, and touched the temples pale,  
 Fixing, then soft with tears, on that white face  
 The eye, which demons shrank from into space.  
 At once that look, intense with rays divine,  
 Warmed his dull blood, as by the warmth of wine ;  
 Youth, health, and love, like birds in spring, returned ;  
 His heart dilated, and his spirit burned.  
 Like a cloud rushing off the sun, beneath      410  
 That radiant glance the deepening mist of death  
 Rolled fast away from the blind nerves and brain,  
 And light shone out of those dim eyes again.

Then said the sage, ‘ I bring thee hope—for lo  
Where weeping sits the faithful maid I know ;  
I could send vassal genii on her track,  
By my strong art, and waft her wondering back  
Swift as the lightning’s flash ; but He who tries  
The hearts of men has willed it otherwise.

The Caliph on his throne must learn from me  
That he is raised so high the truth to see,  
That he whose will towards evil hath been bent,  
Although a King, must suffer and repent—  
Must, under God, renew his right to sway,  
By full atonement in the blaze of day.

But now, arise ! no hour is to be lost,  
Lest by some evil star our path be crossed ;  
Saturn not long his malice idle keeps,  
Not long, unharzing, the red planet sleeps ;  
We must go forth, whilst yet to us is given  
A light of hope from yonder smiling heaven.’  
Then Hatim blest his son, and for the Mede  
Bade them lead out his noblest Arab steed.

Joy, mixed with awe, on that glad household fell,  
Whilst they closed round to bid their boy farewell,  
Thence by Hit’s sullen wells they journeyed on,  
Towards Tadmor, summoned up by Solomon,  
Whose demon columns yet unbroken stand,  
Snow-white against the Desert’s yellow sand—

Past Antar’s iron ridge they toil, to reach  
Kuteifah’s crag, and Bahret’s glittering beach ;  
Till Asia’s pearl in her full lustre met  
Their eyes, amid her emerald meadows set—  
There shone she in the sunset’s mellow gleams,  
Damascus—city of the lucid streams.

‘ At length,’ exclaimed the Mede, ‘ our goal is won ;  
I am thy father, thou art now my son ! ’

420

430

440

## PART II.

And thus as father and as son, the two  
Passed with their slaves the royal city through,  
Here earnest work, there careless mirth was loud,      450  
Bee-like, or drone-like hummed that swarming crowd,  
For there was held a solemn festival,  
When these two reared, on pillars firm and tall,  
Their spacious tent close to the Harem wall.  
Merchants they seemed, and gems they brought to sell,  
Veined through with splendours inconceivable—  
None such 'mid Ava's glowing pebbles are,  
Nor in the river-beds of Malabar.  
Gems were they, that had shot their dazzling rays  
Around some angel brow, in ancient days,      460  
Ere yet in heaven was heard the sound of strife,  
Or the red clay grew quick with Adam's life.  
But whence, or how, the Magian called them through  
Space measureless and void, *He* only knew.  
Robes, too, shone there woven beneath the light  
Of fairy lands, by fairy fingers white,  
Steeped, as it were, in living smiles, that played,  
Like many-coloured flames, about the braid.  
For healing, too, strange elements they kept  
Wherein lost powers and hidden magic slept ;      470  
Thus soon through that old city, built by man  
From Eden fresh, the tale of wonder ran ;  
How chased by them, like baffled beasts of prey  
Before the sun, diseases fled away.  
So all men reverenced the sage, and yet  
With deeper love they followed Neamet.

Beautiful was he, and without a peer ;  
 But not for that alone they held him dear.  
 The sage around him breathed an atmosphere—  
 A subtle essence of delight and power,      480  
 Clothing his youth, as fragrance clothes a flower ;  
 And in that atmosphere he moved and dwelt,  
 Till underneath his presence all men felt,  
 Down to the roots of being, a sweet sense  
 Of swift, inexplicable influence,  
 That drew their hearts out of themselves away,  
 Each motion of his spirit to obey ;  
 As the numb soul of iron wakes to own  
 Life, thrilling through it, from the mystic stone.

But Time passed on ; day after day, the same,      490  
 And still no tidings of lost Noam came.  
 She, when that traitress foul had given her up  
 To drink the bitter dregs of sorrow's cup,  
 Had found no mosque, no blessing—but was taken  
 Straight to the Viceroy's hall, and there forsaken.  
 He sneered and said, 'Those glorious eyes are wet  
 With angry tears, that heart is sore, but yet  
 The queen I make to-day with thanks shall own her debt.  
 As the sun quenches moonlight, so the ray  
 Of power's bright orb will drive faint love away ;      500  
 Or, if that love to Neamet still clings,  
 Think, short the life of those who rival kings.  
 It rests with you to save him or to kill.'  
 'Twas thus, with beating heart and broken will,  
 The bride of Neamet—no more a bride—  
 Was borne, escorted, and accompanied  
 By fifty horsemen, on in hurrying flight,  
 Unto the Caliph's mansions of delight.  
 There, though betrothed with Moslem rites, they gave  
 Her to the King, as paramour and slave.      510

He, doting on her beauty, left no art  
Of love untried to touch and win her heart ;  
Poured out as gifts, in wild magnificence,  
All that could glad the eye or charm the sense ;  
But vainly all, she, fixed and silent there,  
Sat like a marble shape, in dumb despair.  
To her, bewildered and disconsolate,  
The Caliph seemed like an embodied Fate—  
A Fate from whose stern grasp she might not fly,  
Though, true to Neamet, she yet could die ;      520  
Her lord and master wondered, ne'er till then  
His love had failed to win back love again.  
But knightly was his nature, and he thought,  
Like other youths, to earn the prize he sought.  
And so she daily grew more thin and weak,  
And the rose-blush upon her tender cheek,  
Through changes never-ending, ebbed away  
As sunset clouds wane into dimness grey.  
Her memory to the loved one's image clung,  
His voice within her ears for ever rung ;      530  
Too well she knew, yea, seemed almost to see,  
How sad, how lost, how changed by grief was he.  
Or if she slept, in dreams she saw him still,  
But saw him dead, and felt Death's icy chill ;  
Then, waking with a scream, she lay forlorn,  
And sobbed, and moaned, and shivered till the morn.  
Just at that time it chanced the Caliph heard  
How the great city to its depth was stirred  
By the strange lore and power of that strange man,  
The aged Mede, the wise magician ;      540  
One trusted by the King at once was sent,  
Though with scant hope, to seek the sage's tent.  
A daughter, fading in her youth, she said,  
Had made her bold to ask the Magian's aid.

He answered : ‘ Ere I search yon orbs of heaven,  
 Her name, her age, her birth-place must be given ;  
 For if the voice of her own stars be dumb,  
 Knowledge availeth not—the end must come.’  
 ‘ In Cufa were we born,’ she said, and lied ;  
 ‘ My daughter Noam is an Emir’s bride ;                        550  
 Scarce sixteen springs have touched her with their breath,  
 Now winter threatens, and the frost of death.’  
 ‘ Thy words are false,’ he answered straight; ‘ but still  
 Insight they give me how to use my skill.  
 She shall not die. Do thou, my son, prepare  
 Our balms from Eden mixed with spices rare.  
 Thy horoscope and hers are one ; though mine  
 The saving thought, the fated hand is thine.’  
 The boy went forth, re-entering soon he bore  
 A casket of white moon-stone<sup>1</sup> from their store.                560  
 ‘ Take this, a charm it holds whose destined scope  
 Is to relight the dying lamp of Hope ;  
 Pain in its presence, sorrows are no more,  
 It will the maid to loving arms restore.’  
 The woman took the gift with reverence due,  
 And to her lady’s chamber straight withdrew.  
 By mystic letters here and there embrowned,  
 With gold embossed that casket was, and bound,  
 And this the healing balm that Noam in it found :  
 ‘ My love, I come to die, or to regain thee,                570  
 Noam, to die for thee, long-sought ;  
 Nor let my death, even for a moment pain thee,  
 For life, if lonely life, is nought.  
 Long mateless years would be but death for either—  
 False death, since far from wicked men  
 The true death joins us. Let us die together,  
 Or live, as we have lived, again.’

<sup>1</sup> A kind of translucent feldspar, not Mr. Wilkie Collins’s diamond.

Poor Noam trembled, shaken from her grief,  
 From head to foot she trembled as a leaf,  
 Then, bathed in tears, half bitter and half sweet,  
 Threw herself down before the woman's feet.  
 'O my friend, look in pity on our lot,  
 Save him, and help him, and betray him not.'  
 And then she told her all from first to last :  
 How their blue sky of love was overcast,  
 How on their heads the sudden thunder fell,  
 She told her, pleading passionately well,  
 Until that aged woman, weeping too,  
 Recalled past years when she was warm and true,  
 And vowed to aid them in that dangerous hour  
 With her whole spirit, her whole heart, and power ;  
 Yea, though the Caliph should the deed mislike,  
 She would face death to save them—let him strike !  
 Then, seeking Neamet, she led him through  
 A wicket gate by windings known to few ;  
 Next, as a girl disguised, she placed him where  
 To Noam's chamber rose an ivory stair.  
 'Be calm,' she said, 'be cautious ; the sixth door  
 As you move through yon golden corridor—  
 Pass it, and find yourself at Noam's feet.  
 The sixth, I say ; be silent and discreet.'  
 But Neamet, impetuous and young,  
 As from the leash a greyhound, onward sprung,  
 His heart beat wildly, many-coloured light  
 Flashed round his dim and palpitating sight,  
 His knees fail under him, he seems to hear  
 The voice of a great flood within his ear ;  
 The rooms come gliding past him, and the ground  
 Heaves into billows like a sea around.  
 What wonder, then, if 'mazed and passion-tost,  
 The clue went from him and the path was lost?  
580  
590  
600  
610

What wonder that amid the gathering gloom  
 He reeled on blindly to that royal room,  
 Where the maid Leila, on her maiden throne,  
 Twin sister to the Caliph, mused alone ?  
 ‘Nay, who is this?’ she cried ; ‘new come, I trow ;  
 Why, Noam’s self is not so fair as thou.  
 Still she gazed on ; but when from Neamet  
 Her gracious looks and words no answer met,  
 She rose, and touched his breast, then in surprise      620  
 She started back, scarce trusting her own eyess.  
 Then half in wrath, she cried, and half in fear,  
 ‘Thou art no maiden,—what has brought thee here ?  
 What hast thou done, rash youth ? Why thus disguised ?  
 Back, back at once, if life be not despised.  
 I would not see thee slain ;’ but then he fell  
 At her feet, pleading passionately well,  
 And told her the whole tale from first to last :  
 How their blue sky of love was overcast,  
 • And what the Mede had done for him, and what      630  
 The agèd slave, and how he heeded not,  
 But lost in passion’s mist had gone astray  
 To place his life in her fair hands that day.  
 Then his great beauty, and yet more the spell  
 Wrought by the mighty master, served him well.  
 At length she spake, thrilled through with the sweet pain  
 Of pity, which she could not hide, though fain :  
 ‘I vow to guide you through this dangerous hour,  
 With my whole spirit, my whole heart and power ;  
 Yea, though my brother should the act mislike,      640  
 And in his anger slay me—let him strike !  
 Yet lose not hope ; who knows him if not I ?  
 Trust but in Allah, and we shall not die.’  
 ‘Then to her maids she called, ‘At once begin,  
 My children, to set forth a feast within ;

With incense, flowers, and crimson hangings graced,  
 Let the hall brighten—only make yé haste.  
 And thou, Mamouna, tell my brother dear,  
 That I entreat his gracious presence here,  
 And as thou goest, through the dim light guide      650  
 This rival fair one to fair Noam's side.'  
 She said and smiled, then whispered, 'Neamet,  
 Take heed, for snares around thee may be set.  
 None but myself must speak to him ; and oh,  
 Would it were over ! His great heart I know ;  
 But yet the will of kings who can foretell—  
 As the sea, fathomless, inscrutable ?  
 This, this at least, young Neamet, I give,  
 One golden moment thou hast now to live ;  
 I would forego all possibilities      660  
 Of sceptred pomp, all that before me lies—  
 The mocking splendours, whilst the heart is dead,  
 When I draw near my joyless marriage bed,  
 As Caliph's sister, not as woman wed.  
 Away with them ! I could lose all to be  
 Noam, whose rush of rapture waiteth thee,  
 Though with my blood I bought the dear delight  
 Of love, for one sweet hour, in Fate's despite.  
 At least that one sweet hour is thine ; no eye  
 Upon that meeting, worth a life, shall pry.      670  
 Go, and be happy, but return before  
 The Caliph comes, or ye may meet no more.'  
 Why tell how lovers one another greet,  
 With no eye watching, no tongue to repeat—  
 How their joy, sparkling out to upper air  
 From gloom, made rich the bleak wastes of despair ;  
 As that flood, conscious of the Prophet's hand,  
 Leapt from black rocks in Horeb's thirsty land,  
 To hide with flowers and fruit the desert sand.

Enough to say it passed, as all things will,680  
 And they returned to wait and tremble still.  
 The Princess soothed them ever with a smile,  
 That cheered, though sick at heart herself the while—  
 Till silver trumpets sounded, and the beat  
 Was heard without of slowly-stepping feet ;  
 Then leaving guards without, the Caliph came :  
 She rose, and called him by his childish name—  
 A name of early love, with power to bring  
 A breath from dawn, a freshness as of spring.  
 She placed young Neamet before his eyes,690  
 Whilst his strong heart grew soft with memories,  
 And cried, ‘Behold, this is my gift ; I pray  
 That what I give thee thou wilt love alway.’  
 The Caliph gazed upon the seeming bride  
 Delightedly, and laughing low, replied,  
 ‘Thanks, thanks, sweet sister mine, no need to fear  
 Lest I hold not this bright young creature dear ;  
 Thy slave is fair as Noam is, and they  
 Shall live together from this very day.  
 But tell me, Leila, how it comes that thou700  
 Hast wept ? There is a trouble on thy brow,  
 Thy cheeks are pale, and dark around thine eyes  
 The trace of tears from some fresh sorrow lies.’  
 ‘Tell me, my own,’ she answered, ‘am I pale ?  
 In truth, but now I heard a piteous tale  
 Of two unhappy lovers, into pain  
 By foes entrapped, and mercilessly slain.’  
 And then she told him all from first to last,  
 Much as from Neamet to her it passed,  
 But added this : ‘He unto whom the maid710  
 Was by that wicked chief but now betrayed,  
 The king, regarding not their plighted troth,  
 In his own halls has foully murdered both :

Red-reeking on the steps of his divan,  
 Their young blood cries aloud to God from man !'  
 Ere the last word had died upon her lips,  
 As the sun frowns, pressed by some dark eclipse,  
 A gloom of instant anger blackly flies

Across his broad clear brow and radiant eyes ;

Then all at once, aflame with righteous ire,

Up leapt the Caliph like a beacon fire.

'A most unroyal act,' he cries, 'indeed;

Could not their love, their beauty, for them plead ?

There are three reasons strong against the deed :

First, all who love should pardon lovers ; all

Who know how beauty can the heart enthrall

Must feel for other men, as true must hold

That by the poet sung so well of old ;

Though law be trampled on, and power defied,

"The faults of love by love are justified."

But here no fault there was, no wrong was done,

The daring lover but reclaimed his own.

Who risks his life for love, to him belong

The praise and tears of youth, the poet's song ;

And whoso lays on him a murderous hand

Accurst through all the years to come shall stand.

Next, the king's house gives shelter ; The king's face

Should be known there but as a sign of grace.

Who once sees God may not be shut from bliss ;

We kings should emulate our God in this.

And my third reason, stronger yet I deem :

Justice should shine as the sun's perfect beam ;

No colour on its whiteness should infringe,

To cloud that pure ray with an alien tinge.

Nor is there any truth more clear than this,

" He who decides in haste, though right, decides amiss.

We, above all, who stand in Allah's place,

His delegates, should weigh the lightest case

720

730

740

With a grave patience and deliberate care  
 (As Heaven is), slow to punish, quick to spare.      750

Beyond this general duty to the laws,  
 If I, the king, am judge in my own cause,  
 Surely, then, surely there is tenfold need  
 Of wrath, and urging passion to take heed,  
 To silence them when they grow loud, and steel  
 The heart against their blind and bitter zeal.  
 But this man, neither reverencing love  
 Nor his own roof-tree (brooding shamed above  
 The shameful act), nor yet the eternal claim  
 Of justice upon every royal name,      760

A stain on us, his brethren, hath let fall,  
 Together with himself, dishonouring all;  
 I know not where he reigns, perchance afar,  
 Beyond the reach of this bright scimitar ;  
 But this, at least, the caitiff wretch shall know,  
 That if I meet him here on earth below,  
 Aye, or in heaven itself, I hold him as a foe.  
 He paused ; at once the Princess, half-afraid,  
 Yet full of hope, the truth before him laid.  
 ‘Nay, he is ruler of no rival state      770

From thee remote ; nor is there need of hate,  
 If thou wilt be but to thyself a friend ;  
 Thou art the man—all but the bitter end.  
 ‘See now ;’ and then she placed them side by side,  
 ‘The daring lover here, and there the bride ;  
 Kneel, Noam, in thy mournful loveliness,  
 To ask of this great judge a great redress ;  
 Kneel, Neamet, let thy just claim be heard,  
 Our Caliph never has recalled his word.’  
 A flush of dark red anger flitted o'er      780

His cheek, to leave it paler than before ;  
 His eye shot savage fire, a scarlet stain  
 Rushed o'er his wounded lip, then dropped like rain ;

But when he saw the lovers prostrate lie,  
 He smiled once more, though somewhat bitterly.  
 ‘Fear not,’ he said, ‘I can be firm and strong  
 Against myself—ye shall not suffer wrong ;  
 But thou, my sister, thou with whom I strayed,  
 From my first youth, through sunshine and through shade,  
 I should have deemed that thou, so wise and kind,      790  
 With all our childish memories intertwined,  
 With our twinned souls laid bare to one another,  
 Whilst yet thou wast but sister to thy brother,  
 Without a thought why I was called the prince,  
 Might know my heart as none have known it since.  
 Leila, was this well done ? I thought that we,  
 What then we were, till death—till death should be,  
 That through thy spirit, crystal-clear as glass  
 From the sea-city, truth should ever pass  
 Undimmed and undistorted ; but, alas !      800  
 It is the curse of kings that they *must* live  
 Ever alone ; and, therefore, I forgive.  
 Yet learn thou also, lady, to be just ;  
 Loving me still—love with a nobler trust.  
 But it is time these children to release  
 From doubt and fear ; Go, little ones, in peace ;  
 This hand of mine shall on your foemen fall,  
 Ruthless as that which gloomed along the wall,  
 When Cyrus came in wrath at Allah’s call ;  
 So dread them not, your debt is fully paid      810  
 If the wise Median will but lend his aid,  
 And teach me how to rule ; with such a guide  
 I scarce can swerve from the straight path aside.’  
 The Magian straight was summoned from his tent,  
 His stately form before the Caliph bent ;  
 From the throne questioned then, he would not hide  
 Aught from the Caliph, but at once replied :

‘I come,’ he said, ‘of a forgotten race,  
 Once mighty amongst nations ; now their place  
 • Knows them no more. My very name will sound      820  
 Strange in your ears, though widely once renowned ;  
 It tells of a dim past, an older creed,  
 For I was named Deioces the Mede.  
 That name a dauntless chief in days of yore,  
 From whom I here inherit it, first bore.  
 Long years have fled since I was taught in youth  
 To ride, to draw the bow, to speak the truth ;  
 Great rivers in that time have turned aside  
 Their course ; great forests have been born and died ;  
 Great empires have arisen, but to fall ;      830  
 Great hearts are dust, yet I live on through all.  
 From the dead summers that have dropped away,  
 From centuries old that bloomed but to decay,  
 I have drawn out the spirit and the power,  
 As the bee, murmuring on from flower to flower,  
 Draws virtue forth ; then, faithful to a trust,  
 Reels home beneath her load of golden dust.  
 All I have hived and garnered thus, is due,  
 Great King, to justice-loving kings, like you—  
 Hence, if your will avouch it, I abide,      840  
 A loyal servant, ever at your side.’  
 So near the throne Deioces remained,  
 Shared his lord’s toil, his mighty life sustained ;  
 His great soul, through its depths, with wisdom fed,  
 Till it was filled, as is the ocean bed,  
 For ever with a light of waters overspread ;  
 And thus in strength and nobleness he grew,  
 Nor did love fail, nor friendships firm and true.  
 Through a long reign his power, his wealth, his fame,  
 By peace and war increased, until his name,      850  
 Motar the Just, beneath the sun unfurled,  
 Shone like a banner streaming o’er the world ;

And when his days were done, and Azrael  
Called him to reap the harvest sown so well,  
The nations that lay safe beneath his wing  
Had but one heart to mourn their noble King.  
'Tis said that when the funeral rites were o'er,  
Deioces the Mede was seen no more ;  
He vanished, silent as a drop of dew,  
Or voiceless cloud that melts amid the blue ;      860  
Men turned, and he was gone ; to reappear  
Perchance, when Islam's danger draweth near.  
Still, why swift hours of golden sunshine mar  
With shadows from a darkness yet afar ?  
Let the grim future claim its prey—but now  
A mandate from the Court tells Hatim how  
He is to execute a righteous doom,  
And rule his province in the dead man's room,  
Like a house built on shifting sands alone,  
By the King's breath that power was overthrown ;      870  
So fell the Viceroy, and the land had rest,  
Whilst high and low the name of Motar blest ;  
His noble heart rejoiced to see meanwhile  
Those married lovers on each other smile,  
And showered his favours down with bounteous hand,  
Till they asked leave to go to their own land.  
Dismissed with royal gifts and speeches fair,  
Thus home to Cufa went that lovely pair.  
Soon goodly sons and daughters, graced by Heaven  
With strength and beauty, to their arms were given ;      880  
They rose, fulfilling Hatim's early dream,  
Like palm-trees rising by a silver stream ;  
And thus with joy, with love that could not pall,  
They dwelt together in that stately hall,  
Till the divider, Death, came down and ended all.

## THE QUICK MARCH OF THE FOURTEENTH REGIMENT.

FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE 'CORNHILL MAGAZINE.'

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[On May 23, 1793, my grandfather Welbore Ellis Doyle rallied his regiment—the 14th of the Line—then wavering under a heavy fire, and stormed the fortified camp of Famars, after a very severe action, to the tune of *Ça Ira*. For many years this tune continued to be the quick march of the 14th Regiment. I understand that of late years the tradition has ceased to operate, and that the march is disused, or, at least, that its origin has been forgotten.]

WHEN first the might of France was set  
'Gainst creeds and laws, long years ago,  
And the great strife—not ended yet—  
Tossed crowns and nations to and fro,  
Now buried deep beneath those wars  
That since have made the earth their prey,  
Our hard-won triumph at Famars  
Was famous in its day.

*Here*—trained through stedfast work, and drilled  
Till as one thought they moved along,  
By the old land's old memories filled,  
Our English lads were calm and strong.  
*There*—drunk on hope as on new wine,  
That in their veins like madness wrought,  
With power half-devilish, half-divine,  
Each restless Frenchman fought.

Wealth, numbers, skill they heeded not,  
Trampling them down as common things ;  
Man's spirit was a fire, made hot  
To burn away the strength of kings.  
Thus armed, as roars before the blast  
At forest trees a prairie flame,  
On our firm silence, fiercely fast  
Their howling frenzy came—

Until (why shun the truth to speak?)  
The courage rooted in the past  
Struck, as by sudden storms, grew weak,  
And wavered like a wavering mast :  
Still kept their time the well-taught feet,  
Nor dreamed the soldier yet of flight,  
Though deepening shadows of defeat  
Fell on him, like a blight.

Straight out in front their leader dashed  
(A God-given king of men was he),  
And from his bright looks on them flashed  
One sparkle of heroic glee :  
'They hold us cheap' (he cried) 'too soon,  
We'll break them, frantic as they are,  
Unto their own accursèd tune ;  
Strike up then *Ça Ira.*'

The drums exulting thundered forth,  
Whilst yet with trumpet tones he spoke,  
And in those strong sons of the North  
The old Berserker laugh awoke.  
Their bayonets glowed with life, their eyes  
Shone out to greet that eagle glance,  
And, in her rush, a strange surprise  
Palsied the steps of France.

Then, like a stream that bursts its banks,<sup>1</sup>  
 To *Ca Ira* from fifes and drums,  
 Upon their crushed and shattered ranks  
 The cataract charge of England comes ;  
 Whilst their own conquering music leapt  
 Forth in wild mirth to feel them run ;  
 Right o'er the ridge that host was swept,  
 And the grim battle won.

Thus, in the face of heaven and earth,  
 From their first home those notes he tore  
 To live, as by a second birth,  
 Linked fast with England evermore.  
 Yes, evermore, that through them still  
 To coming ages might be shown,  
 Whose arrowy thought and iron will  
 Had made that prize his own.

Thence, as each panting year rushed by  
 With garments rolled in blood—His march  
 Went sounding onwards, far and nigh—  
 Beneath cold rains, or suns that parch,  
 Northward or southward—east or west,  
 Where still the heirs of that renown,  
 Behind some other colonel, pressed  
 To the field hurrying down.

For him, alas ! on Java's shore  
 It throbbed unheard through purple skies,  
 Nor marked he, under dark Bhurtpore,  
 The blood-bought battle-hymn arise.

<sup>1</sup> This line is from ‘Rokeby.’ I borrowed it unconsciously at the moment, and thought afterwards that Scott was quite rich enough to lend it to me without feeling the loss.

New Zealand's fern-gloom, as they stept,  
Might quiver to that piercing tone,  
But him it stirred not, where he slept  
In a far land—alone.

And, whilst o'er its old ground, the strain  
Smote with high scorn our ancient foe,  
Called he upon those drums again?  
Shared he their closing rapture? No!  
His grave lay deep in dust, before  
They pealed through Belgian corn-crops, when  
The baffled Eagle fell, no more  
To tear the hearts of men.

Yes, he died young, and all in vain  
We dream how much he left undone,  
Painting, upon an idle brain,  
The glorious course he should have run.  
Forgotten by the reckless years,  
He rests apart—and makes no sign—  
Even his proud march no longer cheers  
The Fourteenth of the Line.

Still, if elsewhere of this no trace  
Remain, by some as worthy deed,  
Oh, youthful soldiers of his race,  
Against oblivion for it plead.  
Thus, if his death-lamp have grown dim,  
Re-light it; thus force Time to spare  
This leaf of laurel, earned by him  
For the old name we bear.

## IPHITION.

FROM THE 'CORNHILL MAGAZINE.'

'Εν δ' Ἀχιλεὺς Τράσσοι θόρε, . . .  
 σμερδαλέα ίάχων· πρῶτον δ' ἔλευ 'Ιφιτίωνα  
 τὸν δ' ιθὺς μεμαῶτα βάλ' ἔγχει δῖος Ἀχιλλεὺς,  
 μέσσην κὰκ κεφαλήν.—*Iliad*, xx. 381, κ.τ.λ.

How, facing an unconquerable foe,  
 Silent and firm in the lost battle's roar,  
 Iphition fell, three thousand years ago,  
 We learn ;—let him have praise for evermore.

What ! though his slayer, drunk with Eastern blood,  
 Be borne aloft on wider wings of fame,  
 Two words, by Homer dropped in careless mood,  
 Give light enough to read a hero's name.

The shout that shattered armies into flight,  
 The godlike form in heaven's own armour clad,  
 The golden plumes divine that lived with light  
 At every step, for him no terrors had.

Right on he rushed, though to a certain doom,  
 Hephaestian mail and matchless strength defied ;  
 And, carrying with him proudly to the tomb  
 The whiteness of his honour, so he died,

There Homer leaves him, like a tall ship wrecked—  
 Leaves him to wolves and vultures where he lay ;  
 But that which makes the man, no bard's neglect  
 To beast, or bird, or Time can yield a prey.

Thus ever, through eternity, we dream  
 That he by looking back is comforted,  
 That the long sunless hours of Hades gleam,  
 With radiance from the past around him shed ;

That inward still he murmurs, as the wind  
 Murmurs through roofless halls : ‘At least I know  
 None find a spot in my young life behind,  
 Nor dread I here what all must undergo.

‘Death cometh—ay ! but after death to say  
 What I with truth *can* say is given to few.  
 Achilles, thine the fame—yet well I may  
 Believe myself the better of the two.

‘Armed by no god, but as my fellow-men,  
 I faltered not in fight, though others fled,  
 Till my safe conqueror struck me down, and then  
 Against his lance, the blood leapt warm and red.

‘And even here, on this unhoping coast,  
 With spirit unexhausted I can bow  
 To what Fate sends ; Achilles, as a ghost,  
 Whines, weak without his god-given armour now.

‘Though all life lent my soul no longer aid ;  
 The memory that I never quailed, for me  
 Keeps vital warmth within. I scorn the shade  
 That, to touch earth again, a slave would be.’<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> ‘Odyssēy,’ b. xi. 488–90.

## THE LOSS OF THE 'BIRKENHEAD':

SUPPOSED TO BE TOLD BY A SOLDIER WHO SURVIVED.

---

RIGHT on our flank the sun was dropping down ;  
 The deep sea heaved around in bright repose ;  
 When, like the wild shriek from some captured town,  
     A cry of women rose.

The stout ship 'Birkenhead' lay hard and fast,  
 Caught without hope upon a hidden rock ;  
 Her timbers thrill'd as nerves, when through them pass'd  
     The spirit of that shock.

And ever like base cowards, who leave their ranks  
 In danger's hour, before the rush of steel,  
 Drifted away disorderly the planks  
     From underneath her keel.

So calm the air—so calm and still the flood,  
 That low down in its blue translucent glass  
 We saw the great fierce fish, that thirst for blood,  
     Pass slowly, then repass.

They tarried, the waves tarried, for their prey !  
 The sea turned one clear smile ! Like things asleep  
 Those dark shapes in the azure silence lay,  
     As quiet as the deep.

Then amidst oath, and prayer, and rush, and wreck,  
Faint screams, faint questions waiting no reply,  
Our Colonel gave the word, and on the deck  
Form'd us in line to die.

To die!—'twas hard, while the sleek ocean glow'd  
Beneath a sky as fair as summer flowers:—  
*All to the boats!* cried one—he was, thank God,  
No officer of ours.

Our English hearts beat true—we would not stir:  
That base appeal we heard, but heeded not:  
On land, on sea, we had our Colours, sir,  
To keep without a spot.

They shall not say in England, that we fought  
With shameful strength, unhonour'd life to seek;  
Into mean safety, mean deserters, brought  
By trampling down the weak.

So we made women with their children go,  
The oars ply back again, and yet again;  
Whilst, inch by inch, the drowning ship sank low,  
Still, under steadfast men.

—What follows, why recall?—The brave who died,  
Died without flinching in the bloody surf,  
They sleep as well beneath that purple tide  
As others under turf.

They sleep as well! and, roused from their wild grave,  
Wearing their wounds like stars, shall rise again,  
Joint-heirs with Christ, because they bled to save  
His weak ones, not in vain.

If that day's work no clasp or medal mark;  
If each proud heart no cross of bronze may press,  
Nor cannon thunder loud from Tower or Park,  
This feel we none the less:—

That those whom God's high grace there saved from ill,  
Those also left His martyrs in the bay,  
Though not by siege, though not in battle, still  
Full well had earned their pay.

## THE RED THREAD OF HONOUR.

TOLD TO THE AUTHOR BY THE LATE GENERAL  
SIR CHARLES NAPIER.

---

ELEVEN men of England  
A breastwork charged in vain ;  
Eleven men of England  
Lie stripped and gashed and slain—  
Slain, but of foes that guarded  
Their rock-built fortress well,  
Some twenty had been mastered,  
When the last soldier fell.

Whilst Napier piloted his wondrous way  
Across the sand-waves of the desert sea ;  
Then flashed at once, on each fierce clan, dismay,  
Lord of their wild Truckee.  
These missed the glen to which their steps were bent,  
Mistook a mandate, from afar half heard,  
And in that glorious error, calmly went  
To death—without a word.

The Robber-chief mused deeply  
Above those daring dead.  
'Bring here,' at length he shouted,  
'Bring quick, the battle thread.'

Let Eblis blast for ever  
 Their souls, if Allah will,  
 But we must keep unbroken  
 The old rules of the Hill.

‘ Before the Ghiznee tiger  
 Leapt forth to burn and slay,  
 Before the holy Prophet  
 Taught our grim tribes to pray ;  
 Before Secunder’s<sup>1</sup> lances  
 Pierced through each Indian glen ;  
 The mountain laws of honour  
 Were framed for fearless men.

‘ Still, when a chief dies bravely,  
 We bind with green one wrist ;  
 Green for the brave—for heroes,  
 One crimson thread we twist—  
 Say ye, oh gallant Hill men,  
 For these whose life has fled,  
 Which is the fitting colour,  
 The green one, or the red ? ’

‘ Our brethren, laid in honoured graves, may wear  
 Their green reward,’ each noble savage said—  
 ‘ To these, whom hawks and hungry wolves shall tear,  
 Who dares deny the red ? ’  
 Thus conquering hate, and stedfast to the right,  
 Fresh from the heart that haughty verdict came,  
 Beneath a waning moon each spectral height  
 Rolled back its loud acclaim.

Once more, the Chief gazed keenly  
 Down on those daring dead ;  
 From his good sword their heart’s blood  
 Crept to that crimson thread ;

<sup>1</sup> Alexander.

Once more he cried, 'The judgment,  
Good friends, is wise and true ;  
But though the red *be* given,  
Have we not more to do ?

' These were not stirred by anger,  
Nor yet by lust made bold,  
Renown they thought above them,  
Nor did they look for gold.  
To them their leader's signal  
Was as the voice of God,  
Unmoved and uncomplaining,  
The path it showed they trod.

' As, without sound or struggle,  
The stars unhurrying march,  
Where Allah's finger guides them,  
Through yonder purple arch ;  
These Franks, sublimely silent,  
Without a quickened breath,  
Went, in the strength of duty,  
Straight to their goal of death.

' If I were now to ask you  
To name our bravest man,  
Ye all at once would answer,  
They called him Mehrab Khan<sup>1</sup>—  
He sleeps among his fathers,  
Dear to our native land,  
With the bright mark he bled for  
Firm round his faithful hand.

' The songs they sing of Roostum  
Fill all the past with light.;

<sup>1</sup> Mehrab Khan died, as he said he would, sword in hand, at the door of his own zenana. Newspaper report.

If truth be in their music,  
 He was a noble knight.  
 But were these heroes living,  
 And strong for battle still,  
 Would Mehrab Khan, or Roostum,  
 Have climbed, like these, the Hill?'

And they replied—‘Though Mehrab Khan was brave  
 As chief, he chose himself what risks to run ;  
 Prince Roostum<sup>1</sup> lied, his forfeit life to save,  
 Which these had never done.’

‘Enough,’ he shouted fiercely ;  
 ‘Doomed though they be to Hell,  
 Bind fast the crimson trophy  
 Round both wrists—bind it well.

‘Who knows but that great Allah  
 May grudge such matchless men,  
 With none so decked in heaven,  
 To the fiends’ flaming den.’  
 Then all those gallant robbers  
 Shouted a stern amen,  
 They raised the slaughtered sergeant,  
 They raised his mangled ten.

And when we found their bodies  
 Lest bleaching in the wind,  
 Around *both wrists*, in glory  
 That crimson thread was twined.

Then Napier’s knightly heart, touched to the core,  
 Rang, like an echo, to that knightly deed ;  
 He bade its memory live for evermore,  
 That those who run may read.

<sup>1</sup> Roostum, overcome in the first instance, escaped death by imposing upon the simple good faith of his son Zohrab, whom he afterwards killed (ignorantly, of course).

VERSES FOR THE FIRST PAGE OF  
A SHAKSPERE.

PRESENTED TO MISS JULIA TOLLEMACHE ON HER MARRIAGE.

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If by some wizard Shakspere's pen  
To me for one short hour were lent,  
This heart of mine, sweet Julia, then  
Might find fit words for all it meant :

Words that should make your name as dear  
To other times as it is now,  
And still shine on, year after year,  
A wreath of stars around your brow.

But as, alas, this may not be,  
I can but say your soul is such  
That could our Shakspere know it, he  
Would love you as I love you—much.

For what you are, that once were they  
Whose bloom he watched with grave delight,  
Then smiled in his bénignant way  
(As on May rose-buds fresh and white).

Trusting that each young flower was sure  
To reach a larger, warmer life ;  
And from a maiden, perfect pure,  
Become a pure and happy wife.

*May 1873.*

## DARKNESS AND LIGHT.

WE stood in silence, weak, and worn, and hapless,  
With Death's pale coming seen at length by all ;  
Whilst withered hopes beneath our feet lay sapless,  
Like leaves that fall.

But, as a fair girl through an opening door,  
Smiles on her father's servant, who has come  
From wearying tasks, and pastimes prized no more,  
To bear her home—

So upon Death our dying maiden smiled ;  
Then laid her head upon that Father's breast,  
And sank, as sinks at eve a happy child,  
Into sweet rest.

Then, though to me that night of bitter pain  
Kept whispering through its frozen gloom, 'Why stop  
For sorrow? life, too heavy to sustain,  
May be let drop.'

And through the vigil, desolate and drear,  
Vainly I listened, vainly looked, to find  
Some voice beyond the void, some ray to cheer  
That darkness blind.

Yet deem I not that God remained apart ;  
Though I saw nought, nor heard the sound of speech,  
Yet He drew near, and pitied the dead heart  
    He could not reach.

For in those hours, by His especial grace,  
    Peace came to one pure breast then wounded sore,  
And in a dream—not all a dream—that face  
    Was seen once more.

Straight, o'er her sleeping sister's head, the blue—  
    The chill deceiving blue—called heaven was rent,  
And other Heavens within, divinely true,  
    To sight were lent.

And there, but not alone, our lost one knelt ;  
    Before her mother bent in sweet surprise,  
She seemed to whisper all she feared and felt,  
    Beneath soft eyes.

Just so she looked of old, to that fond mother  
    Confessing some child-fault of days gone by ;  
One angel arm shone round her thrown, the other  
    Was raised on high,

And pointed to a light that burned above,  
    Immeasurably distant—but yet near ;  
Radiant though soft, the perfect light of love  
    Which casts out fear.

Thus from those presences a blessing fell,  
    First on the sorrowing girl, direct from Heaven,  
Thence, even to me, because I too loved well,  
    Through her was given.

## F R O M H E I N E.

A PINE-TREE standeth lonely  
 On a bleak northern hill.  
 And sleeps with ice surrounded  
 With snow that falleth still.

There is one palm he dreams of,  
 Far in the morning land,  
 Who mourns alone, and silent,  
 Mid rocks and burning sand.

## STANZAS SUGGESTED BY THE ABOVE.

THEY dream, but dreams are of the night ;  
 Will not the sun rise by-and-by ?  
 Or is the hope that thirsts for light  
 Only a mocking lie ?

A wondrous dawn may wake, and turn  
 To floods of life the phantom snows,  
 Whilst desert sands that drift and burn  
 Shall blossom as the rose.

The pine and palm may feel that then  
 Both cold and heat, and Time and Space,  
 On polar crag, in tropic glen,  
 To other laws give place.

Through them, whilst the young heavens grow rife  
With joy, and airs divinely sweet,  
Distance dies off from spirit-life,  
That severed hearts may meet.

Oh leave that thought to float above,  
Each parching leaf, each blighted bough ;  
It breathes of hope, it breathes of love,  
It worketh on—even now,

In that dark pine's despairing breast,  
To melt the bitter frost of pain ;  
And on his drooping palm-tree's crest  
Falls like the early rain.

## ANDALUSIAN CANZONE T.

FROM THE FRENCH OF THÉOPHILE GAUTIER.

---

DOWN sliding from my snow-white bosom,  
Fell lost a red carnation blossom  
    Within the whirling river.  
Alas ! that blossom how recover,  
By the rude torrent washed all over,  
    Then borne away for ever ?  
Oh, lovely floweret, earth's bright daughter,  
    Why trust the stream, to ruin hastening ?  
Had I not tears enough to water  
    Thy sweet life, slowly wasting ?

## H E L E N.

IMITATED FROM THE FRENCH.

AMID the green brook-fringing grasses  
 Droops Helen, with her young life shattered.  
 O'er brow and arm, in shining masses,  
 The golden curls are scattered.

Her white feet play within the river,  
 As throbs her heart, so play they faster,  
 With sand and foam-bells troubling ever  
 Each crystal wave flung past her.

From a branch o'er the bright flood leaning,  
 To watch each shadow as it glances,  
 A bird sings with such force and meaning,  
 She hears (it seems) not fancies.

Remonstrance warbled thus : ‘Oh, maiden,  
 Why taint my pure stream thus ? Why wrong her ?  
 With sand and foam, and tears o'erladen,  
 She mirrors heaven no longer.

‘The sun, the moon, the stars within her,  
 Lost nothing of their living beauty.  
 Depart then, leaving Time to win her  
 Back to the light of duty.’

The maiden murmured, ‘Yes ! too surely  
She brightens when I am not near her.  
The blue sky, since she floweth purely,  
Holds her as dear, or dearer.

‘But woe is me—for endless sorrow—  
A maiden’s soul, unlike this river,  
Once darkened, knows no brighter morrow.  
Her heaven is gone for ever.’

## SECRET AFFINITIES:

A PANTHEISTIC FANTASY, FROM THE FRENCH OF  
THÉOPHILE GAUTIER.

---

DEEP in the vanished time, two statues white,  
On an old temple's front, against blue gleams  
Of an Athenian sky, instinct with light,  
Blended their marble dreams.

In the same shell imbedded (crystal tears  
Of the sad sea mourning her Venus flown),  
Two pearls of loneliest ocean, through long years,  
Kept whispering words unknown.

In the fresh pleasaunce, by Grenada's river,  
Close to the low-voiced fountain's silver showers,  
Two roses, from Boabdil's garden, ever  
Mingled their murmuring flowers.

Upon the domes of Venice, in a nest  
Where love from age to age has had his day,  
Two white doves, with their feet of pink, found rest  
Through the soft month of May.

Dove, rose, pearl, marble, into ruin dim  
Alike dissolve themselves, alike decay ;  
Pearls melt, flowers wither, marble shapes dislimn,  
And bright birds float away.

Each element, once free, flies back to feed  
The unfathomable Life-dust, yearning dumb,  
Whence God's all-shaping hands in silence knead  
Each form that is to come.

By slow, slow change, to white and tender flesh  
The marble softens down its flawless grain ;  
The rose, in lips as sweet and red and fresh  
Refigured, blooms again.

Once more the doves murmur and coo beneath  
The hearts of two young lovers, when they meet ;  
The pearls renew themselves, and flash as teeth  
Through smiles divinely sweet.

Hence sympathetic emanations flow,  
And with soft tyranny the heart controul ;  
Touched by them, kindred spirits learn to know  
Their sisterhood of soul.

Obedient to the hint some fragrance sends,  
Some colour, or some ray with mystic power,  
Atom to atom never swerving tends,  
As the bee seeks her flower.

Of moonlight visions round the temple shed,  
Of lives linked in the sea, a memory wakes,  
Of flower-talk flushing through the petals red  
Where the bright fountain breaks.

Kisses, and wings that shivered to the kiss,  
On golden domes afar, come back to rain  
Sweet influence ; faithful to remembered bliss,  
The old love stirs again.

Forgotten presences shine forth, the past  
Is for the visionary eye unsealed ;  
The breathing flower, in crimson lips recast,  
Lives to herself revealed.

Where the laugh plays a glittering mouth within  
The pearl reclaims her lustre softly bright ;  
The marble throbs, fused in a maiden skin  
As fresh, and pure, and white.

Under some low and gentle voice the dove  
Has found an echo of her tender moan ;  
Resistance grows impossible, and love  
Springs up from the unknown.

Oh ! thou whom burning, trembling, I adore,  
What shrine, what sea, what dome, what rose-tree  
bower,  
Saw us, as mingling marble, joined of yore,  
Or pearl, or bird, or flower ?

## THE FOUNTAIN.

FROM THE FRENCH OF THÉOPHILE GAUTIER.

---

A FOUNTAIN bubbles forth, hard by the lake,  
 Between two stones up-sparkling ever,  
 And merrily their course the waters take,  
 As if to launch some famous river.

Softly she murmurs, ‘What delight is mine !  
 It was so cold and dark below ;  
 But now my banks green in the sunlight shine,  
 Bright skies upon my mirrow glow ;

‘The blue forget-me-nots through tender sighs,  
 “Remember us,” keep ever saying ;  
 On a strong wing the gem-like dragon-flies  
 Ruffle me, as they sweep round playing.

‘The bird drinks at my cup ; and now who knows  
 After this rush through grass and flowers,  
 I may become a giant stream, that flows  
 Past rocks and valleys, woods and towers.

‘My foam may lie, a lace-like fringe, upon  
 Bridges of stone, and granite quays,  
 And bear the smoking steam-ship on, and on,  
 To earth-embracing seas.’

Thus the young rivulet prattled as it went,  
With countless hopes and fancies fraught ;  
Like boiling water in a vessel pent,  
Throbbed through its bed the imprisoned thought.

But close upon the cradle frowns the tomb ;  
A babe the future Titan dies,  
For in the near lake's gulph of azure gloom  
The scarce-born fountain buried lies.

## THE HUT.

FROM THÉOPHILE GAUTIER.

UNDER thick trees, about it swaying,  
A hump-backed hovel crouches low ;  
The roof-tree bends—the walls are fraying,  
And on the threshold mosses grow.

Each window-pane is masked by shutters,  
Still, as around the mouth in frost  
The warm breath rises up and flutters,  
Life lingers here—not wholly lost.

One curl of silver smoke is twining  
Its pale threads with the silent air,  
To tell God that there yet is shining  
A soul-spark in that ruined lair.





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